

# Chearful Thoughts

ON THE

## HAPPINESS of a RELIGIOUS LIFE.

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THE SECOND EDITION.

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To which are added,

## REFLECTIONS

ON THE

UNACCEPTABLENESS OF A DEATH-BED

## REPENTANCE.

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THE THIRD EDITION.

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By E. HARWOOD. *W*

Nam cum animus, cognitis perceptisque virtutibus, a corporis obsequio indulgentiaque discesserit, voluptatemque, sicut labem aliquam decoris, oppresserit, omnemque mortis dolorisque timorem effugerit, societatemque caritatis coierit cum suis, omnesque naturâ conjunctos, suos duxerit, cultumque Deorum et puram Religionem suscepit, et exaucerit illam, ut oculorum, sic ingenii aciem, ad bona eligenda et rejicienda contraria, quid eo dici aut cogitari poterit beatius !

*Cic. de Legibus, p. 69, 70. edit. Davis, 1727.*

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MDCCLXVII.



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TO THE  
YOUNG PERSONS

OF THE

SOCIETY of Protestant Dissenters  
in *Tucker Street, Bristol.*

THIS Manual I present to you, the fruit of the little leisure I could redeem from my stated ministerial offices. Solely to serve your best interests it was composed, during the happy intervals of a threatening indisposition, with which for many years I have been afflicted. If God should see fit to dismiss me from my pastoral services among you, I beg this little treatise may be ever regarded as a monument of the sincerest love it was in my power to express for you.

The happiness of a religious life was ever my favourite and darling theme. The consolations of Religion have been my own support and comfort in all the trials, sorrows, and sufferings with which I have conflicted. A good heart, and a good conscience, will enable us to pass through life with great satisfaction. Religion is that heavenly science that will teach you and me to live happily and die comfortably. Religion is the parent of joy, an unabating source of the divinest mental happiness in every scene and circumstance of this vain and fugitive life. There is not an happier being on the globe, I speak experimentally, than a sincere Christian. Communion with God, by a devout heart and holy affections, yields the noblest pleasures that can be tasted on this side heaven. Indeed the felicity a religious life inspires is the *beginning* of our

our heaven. Hath any one such pretensions to joy and chearfulnes, as he who has a vital practical persuasion of the truth of the Gospel, who makes conscience of sincerely living up to the dignity of the Christian character, and animates his spirit by warm anticipations of that immortality it promiseth! When I am recommending a religious life to you as the happiest path you can pursue, I am asserting nothing but what all the wise and good, that ever lived, have unanimously approved, as man's supreme good and sole felicity. You have signalized yourselves as the friends of rational Religion and Christian Liberty; but for God's sake, and for your own sake, be *more* solicitous to distinguish yourselves for an inviolable attachment to the sacred interests of *personal* holiness. May the Almighty guide your feet into the delectable paths

paths of his commandments ! May God direct you to such friendships and connections in life, as shall, through his blessing, be productive of your virtue and happiness ! May Heaven preserve you from the fatal snares of the harlot, from the blandishments of forbidden pleasure, from the seductions of bad company, and from that voluptuousness, that dissoluteness, that debauchery and profligacy, which you have seen, in so many deplorable instances, have rendered this frail momentary life a scene of horror and wretchedness unutterable. If you would not be so miserable for ten thousand worlds, as you have *known* and *seen* some abandoned persons have made themselves, you must not pursue the courses *they* did. Frustate not the expectations of your fond parents and affectionate friends. They hope every thing from your sobriety and

and virtue. Bring not your parents grey hairs with sorrow to the grave. Deprive them not of consolation at a time of life when most they need consolation. The friendship and respect you have ever shown me call forth my grateful acknowledgments ; but permit me to say, that the *greatest* respect you can shew me, is a good life. My comfort and happiness as your pastor, are dependent on your virtuous, amiable conduct. Deny me not this satisfaction. Your conscientious uniform compliance with the great duties of practical Religion will not *only* be my *joy and crown of rejoicing*, but prove an indefectible fountain of pure and permanent happiness to *yourselves* in every stage of this life's short pilgrimage. Need I use any other argument to induce you to embrace a religious life, than what inspiration addresses to us all, That

RELIGION

RELIGION HAS THE PROMISE OF THIS LIFE, AND OF THE LIFE WHICH IS TO COME. Deliberately resolve then to make this wise choice, from which you will assuredly derive the most pure, elegant, sacred, substantial happiness, both through the transitory moments of this world, and through the revolving ages of a blessed and boundless immortality ! I am, with the sincerest regard for your temporal and eternal felicity,

Your affectionate pastor,

And most obliged friend

And servant,

*Bristol,  
July 23, 1765.*

28 SE60

E. HARWOOD.

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CHEARFUL THOUGHTS  
ON THE  
HAPPINESS  
OF A  
RELIGIOUS LIFE.

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C H A P. I.

**A** WICKEDER calumny was never fixed upon Religion, than that of its being a gloomy, morose, and melancholy thing. The father of lies never invented and propagated a greater falsehood, than that Religion is a stranger to chearfulness ; and that he, who once entertains this mournful guest, must, from that moment, bid an everlasting adieu to all the joys of human life. Strange !

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that

## 2      *The Happiness of*

that *That*, which our merciful Creator designed should be the law and felicity of our beings, whose signatures he hath, in our original formation, so deeply and indelibly impressed on the tablet of the human heart, whose rules his wisdom and goodness intended should constitute the measure and standard of our actions ; that *That* which all our moral and intellectual powers approve as the sole genuine fountain of happiness, should ever be represented as something far from being amiable and delectable in its *nature*, whatever it may be in its *consequences*, and necessarily productive of melancholy dejection, and a certain rough, stern, rigid, forbidding austerity. Strange ! that ever men should believe, and teach others to believe, that Religion, which God designed should be the noblest source of the noblest joy, consists in a certain fullen mortification, in a rigorous maceration of the body and spirit, in a devoted monkish abstraction

from

from the world, and in a cheerless, affected abnegation of every thing that hath the least tendency to promote alacrity and joy. What principles could induce men thus to frustrate the intentions of their benevolent Creator, thus to pervert the very end and primary design of their formation! What malice of infernal dæmons, or malignity of mortals with minds as dark and gloomy as theirs, first shed this baneful poison into the divine fountain, and infected that sacred spring, which God designed should ever send forth the most pure, lucid, and salutary streams!

—But it is no unusual thing with men to oppose their Creator's will, to counteract his merciful purpose by the most *unnatural* perversion, and to make those very things, which our great and good Parent intended to be the unabating sources of cheerfulness and joy, the fertile causes of gloomy dejection, and every thing inauspicious to human felicity. I know not what melancholy plea-

sure it is some Divines cherish, in continually exhibiting Religion in a form, in which God, and Jesus, and Nature, never intended it should be exhibited before men. Sketching this celestial Inhabitant in a fordid rueful garb, in a melancholy desponding attitude, with a countenance pale and haggard, with tresses wild and dishevelled, her eyes incessantly raining torrents of briny tears, her pensive bosom heaving with profound sighs and dismal groans, and her whole mien, and air, and form, charged with every thing that can excite horror, disgust, and aversion. I am sure such exhibitions, as *these*, of Religion, which entranced devotees and visionaries, in all ages, have been always so fond of pourtraying, have done inconceivable mischief to the minds and morals of young persons. If I would effectually deter a young person from a religious life, I would hold up to him a mirror, in which he should see religion exhibited in the form and features in which

she

she is but too commonly painted. Religion is described to youth, as incompatible with all pleasure how innocent soever ; as laying a cruel embargo upon all amusements, recreations, diversions, how harmless and inoffensive soever ; as totally inconsistent with all juvenile delights ; as frowning with a menacing dismal aspect upon the world, and all its joys—What is the consequence ?—Why, the most pernicious destructive consequence ensues that can ever happen to an immortal being. Such a description of Religion creates in young minds an aversion to it—an insuperable aversion to admit to their bosoms so fullen and so mournful a companion. No wonder that youth, at a season of life when the heart is susceptible of such strong and such tender sensibilities, when all the warm emotions and affections of the soul disclose in all their native energy and force, and human life appears to them one vast various scene, replete with so many fond attractions, fur-

nished with such a large and most magni-  
cent apparatus of happiness, to wonder, in  
*such a season*, with *such* sensibilities, when  
friendly Nature, and the God of Nature,  
offer their bounties with such a liberal and  
indulgent hand, that any deformed, melan-  
choly malignant intruder, that would sternly  
interdict the innocent fruition of these enjoy-  
ments, repulse the hand that held them  
forth, seclude every form of festivity and  
joy, and instantly wrap the sprightly scene in  
the horrors of gloomy darkness—no wonder,  
such a morose ungracious intruder should be  
rejected with contempt, and treated with the  
last aversion. Thousands and millions of  
immortal souls, I am afraid, have been ruined  
and lost for ever, merely through this one  
most false and fatal notion they have imbibed,  
that Religion is a *gloomy* thing, an irrecon-  
cileable foe to pleasure, essentially repugnant  
to the gaiety of youth—consequently, it is  
repulsed with horror, deferred to some fu-  
ture

ture season more favourable to *melancholy*, and fitter to entertain so morose and mortified an associate. How is Religion injured, when it is viewed through a false medium, and its divine person, its engaging form, and all its attractive grace, elegance, and sweet-ness, are, by the illusion of systematic glasses, made to appear coarse, rude, inelegant, and distorted, and exhibited to the contemplating eye in all that deformity and horror, with which such elaborate improvements in the profound science of gloomy Divinity can so artfully disguise it ! How is Religion misrepresented and traduced, when men are taught to form unhappy ideas of it, as something unnatural, as something repugnant to the laws of their being, as something destructive to the true enjoyment of life, and a violence offered to all the native dispositions, propensities, and affections of the human heart ! Religion is the parent of joy. Religion is the sole parent of the most pure, rational,

sacred, heart-ennobling joy. It is the grand, primary, fundamental law of our natures: our being's great end and aim: our being's supreme felicity and perfection: the sole good and unrivalled happiness of mortals. Religion connects us to God, allies us to happy angels and blessed spirits in the realms of immortality, and constitutes the sole dignity and proper glory of our natures.

## C H A P. II.

**I**N TENDING to represent Religion as most lovely and amiable in its nature, as introducing us into a path the most pleasant and delectable into which our feet can be directed, and as productive of peace, tranquillity, joy, and the noblest mental satisfaction, suffer me to observe, That Religion is congenial to the human mind, and to all our intellectual and moral powers. The least reflection will convince us, that we did not

form

form ourselves, any more than a magnificent palace was formed by chance, any more than the sun, moon, and stars were fixed in their respective orbits by fate, or the regular and beautiful system of the world combined by the fortuitous jumble of atoms. We cannot think of our formation, the amazing structure of our bodies, and the more amazing structure of our minds, without the idea of the supreme First Cause and Universal Parent necessarily obtruding itself upon our reflections. Whenever we seriously contemplate our frame, we naturally look to GOD, from whom our existence, and all the happiness of our existence is originally and ultimately derived. *Abba, Father!* is the natural dictate of the human heart—is the natural invocation and address, which an intelligent creature prefers to its wife and good Creator. Our dependence is suggested by every thing in us and around us. It is the constant unremitting energy of the Deity, that maintains our animal powers

in their regular functions, and our intellectual faculties in their continual operations. In the Deity we live, move, and enjoy natural and moral existence. His influence conserves those powers in their uniform exercise which he originally imparted ; his benevolent agency perpetuates to us the fruition of our understanding, reason, and affections ; and there is no enjoyment, natural or moral, with which we are blessed, of which he is not the primary and most merciful Donor. All the streams of all our felicity flow from him as their original Fountain\*. All our

\* The following Passage of *Boethius* is truly sublime and devotional.

O qui perpetuâ mundum ratione gubernas,  
 Terrarum cœlique Sator ! Qui tempus ab ævo  
 Ire jubes ; stabilisque manens das cuncta moveri,  
 Da, Pater, augustam menti constendere sedem,  
 Da fontem lustrare boni, da luce repertâ  
 In te conspicuas animæ defigere visus.  
 Disjice terrenæ nebulas et pondera molis,  
 Atque tuo splendore nica. Tu namque serenum  
 Tu requies tranquilla piis, te cernere, finis,  
 Principium, vector, dux, semita, terminus, idem.

*Boeth.* Lib. iii. Met. 9.

personal, domestic, and social happiness, all our improvements in knowledge and in holiness, are justly and thankfully to be ascribed to him, who furnished us with perceptions for tasting the *one*, and with powers for attaining the *other*.—In this view how reasonable a service doth Religion appear! How *natural* an expression is it of our gratitude for such immense obligations bestowed! How essential, how ingenuous a return is it to the greatest and best of Beings, who endowed us with such capacities, enabled us to relish such exalted enjoyments, adorned our natures with such an apparatus of elegant sensibilities, inspired us with such dignity and elevation of mind, and most munificently poured around us such a liberal profusion and most immense variety of happiness! How infinitely are we indebted to our most merciful Creator for furnishing us with such perceptions, for lavishing upon us such a multiplicity of intellectual blessings, and making us

us capable of enjoying such sublime, refined, and exalted pleasures, as result from the contemplation of himself, from the exercise of our best affections, from a devout conscious sense of our dependence on so good a Being, and from a survey of that astonishing wisdom, contrivance, and goodness, which universal Nature, in all its parts, exhibits before us ! The assiduous culture of such exalted faculties, and worthy dispositions as these, is the most delightful exercise ; an employment of them, which Nature generously dictates, which the heart suggests, as the incumbent duty of dependent beings, and which all our powers approve as the sole worthy return of beneficiaries for benefactions so immense.

The Being, who implanted in the human heart this illustrious train of intellectual abilities, perceptions, and dispositions, gave, at the same time, a tendency to these affections. —But to what do these moral endowments and dispositions naturally tend ?—They *naturally*

turally tend to God. They all ultimately concenter in him, from whom they were derived. They acknowledge their Parent, in all their generous efforts they indicate, they fix the contemplating mind upon him, aspire after him, acquiesce in him, as the sole object that can, from the infinite plenitude of his benignity, satisfy their enlarged and boundless desires. The heart and all its powers approve his service, as perfect liberty, and perfect happiness, feel a kindred, a congenial satisfaction in the delightful exercise of devout and grateful affections towards him, feel a sacred and holy transport in the religious and virtuous cultivation of such principles and dispositions as are pleasing to him, and taste the most exquisite pleasure, that can be tasted in this world, in maintaining a communion and intercourse with the great *Father* of their immortal *spirits*. What is Religion, but an assimilation to the blessed God, in his purity, holiness, rectitude, and moral

moral perfection. A study, a virtuous ambition, to be as like the God we serve as possible in the temper and disposition of our minds, constitutes the very essence of religion. And O what a pleasing and delectable exercise is this ! To be employed in the imitation of God, exercising, like him, the dispositions and affections he hath given us in the diffusion of happiness, and making those principles, which are the foundation of *his* immutable and consummate happiness, the basis on which we are determined to erect all *our* happiness ! How naturally does the human heart prompt such truths and practical principles as these ! And what exalted felicity results from carrying these into execution ! They really reward themselves in their performance. By our cherishing such dispositions, the intention of nature, and of the Author of nature, is answered, and the applause of our faithful consciences tells us it is answered.— *Our understanding* gives its suffrage to Religion,

gion, as the great law of our Creator, and the supreme happiness of our natures. It represents such a service as infinitely natural and infinitely reasonable, as the just dictate of dependence, the equitable tribute of gratitude, and an indispensable obligation upon frail and indigent creatures for the various blessings of their all-sufficient Benefactor. Our *will*, *judgment*, *moral taste*, and *discernment*, unite in giving their sanction to Religion, as what solely constitutes the moral union and harmony of all the mental powers; they recommend it, choose it, and conjoin in approving it, as the source of the most substantial and permanent happiness, and as perfective of the true dignity and glory of our rational and immortal natures. Our *conscience* seals and stamps with its solemn sanction the intrinsic worth and native excellence of Religion, strongly, painfully remonstrating against every wilful violation of its laws, and applauding every virtuous compliance

pliance with its great injunctions. So that you see all our intellectual and moral powers *harmoniously* concur in giving their attestation to the unrivalled amiableness and importance of Religion, in representing it as the noblest attainment, the most *natural*, and consequently the *best* exercise of our rational faculties, as the primary cardinal law impressed upon us in our formation, as the first and ultimate design of our Creator, as the consummate felicity of our natures, as the best moral *copy* of the great divine *Original*, as the fairest imitation of the Deity, the great first Standard and supreme Exemplar of all moral beauty and perfection.

### C H A P. III.

**R**ELIGION is a most amiable and delightful exercise, as it leads to pleasing acts of love, gratitude, and confidence in the blessed God. It must supply the most grate-

grateful soothing reflections to an intelligent being to consider itself perpetually under the cognizance of a Creator the most merciful, of an Almighty Governor, who sways the most benevolent sceptre, of a Parent, who presides over the whole collective Family in heaven and earth with the most affectionate and indulgent tenderness, promoting the best interests of the creatures he hath formed and superintends, and conducting them to happiness, through ways and means frequently inscrutable to us. What animating consolation doth it inspire, to reflect, that we have irresistible power to protect us, infinite wisdom to illuminate and direct us, eternal justice and rectitude to befriend us, boundless mercy to compassionate us, and the most transcendent goodness to supply all our returning wants! What conscious satisfactions, what cheering invigorating comforts result from these meditations! How pleasing is gratitude in its exercise towards such a Benef-

factor ! With what cordial warmth and generous ardour do we pay such a good Being the tribute of our acknowledgments ! How delightful is it to recognize our dependence on such a Being, to review and enumerate our obligations to him, and to affect our hearts with a fervent glowing sense of the numberless mercies his liberal hand hath showered upon us ! How ravishing, how transporting is the exercise of love to such a Parent, and such a Friend ! How infinitely amiable does such a Being appear to us, when viewed through the medium of his diffusive universal goodness ! How do such transcendent excellencies, as unite in the Deity, engage our esteem, excite our admiration, attract our love ! How infinitely amiable and lovely such a character ! Every thing in us, and around us, conspires to endear it to us. How many ideas does that short sentence of St. John comprise ! *God is Love !* How pleasing the thought, to be under the guardian-

guardianship of infinite Love and infinite Goodness ! What peace, and joy, and comfort ineffable doth it infuse into the mind, to revolve these great truths, to bring them home to the bosom, to range over them in idea, and to give free and liberal scope to the heart in devoutly contemplating them !

“ I am the care of God ! All my interests  
“ for time and eternity are safe in the hands  
“ of my faithful Creator ! I am the object  
“ of his complacential love ! If virtuous,  
“ he will never desert me ; I have every  
“ thing to hope from such an indulgent  
“ Parent and benevolent Friend ! He is  
“ the spectator of my actions, but ever  
“ disposed to pity my infirmities, and to  
“ make all gracious allowances for my errors  
“ and imperfections ! Nothing can invade my  
“ peace, poison the streams of my happiness,  
“ and injure my temporal and everlasting  
“ interests, while I have such Goodness  
“ watching over me, and with all the

“ follicitude of paternal tenderness and love,  
“ consulting and securing my happiness for  
“ both worlds.”

What consolation do these reflections administer ! What mental satisfaction do they impart ! Into what placid tranquillity do they sooth all the powers of the soul ! The mind feels a congenial happiness in expatiating over them, in revolving the immense benefits of its divine Benefactor, and contemplating its absolute dependence on so wise and good a Parent. Even an *Heathen*, when he reviewed his obligations to the Deity, and the blessings which flowed from his providential administration of the world, could break out into the following pathetic and affecting strains : “ What words can sufficiently cele-  
“ brate, or adequately convey, the great Cre-  
“ ator’s praise ! Since we are endowed with  
“ intellectual powers, what ought *we* to do,  
“ both publickly and privately, but celebrate  
“ the Deity, chant his praises, and recount his  
“ favours !

“ favours ! Amidst our employments in agriculture, amidst the various bounties of a plenteous table, ought not we to utter devout ejaculations of praise to our beneficent Creator ! Great is the Divinity, for he hath directed us to cultivate the ground, and spread fertility and plenty around us ! Great is the Divinity, for he hath constructed the amazing system of our bodies, furnished us with hands, with the power of masticating and swallowing our food, the power of digesting it, the power of gradual and insensible growth, and the power of breathing while we sleep ! Each of these mercies ought to excite our acknowledgments, and engage us to pour the most rapturous odes of praise to him for giving us faculties to attain the knowledge of these pleasing truths, and to apply them properly. What though the majority, says he, are blind to these obvious sentiments, ought not he, who knows and feels their moment, to sup-

“ ply this general defect and hymn the Cre-  
 “ ator? What can I do else, adds the Phi-  
 “ losopher, who am now old and a cripple,  
 “ but celebrate my God? Had I been a dumb,  
 “ irrational creature, I should have acted as  
 “ such. But since I am formed a rational  
 “ intelligent agent, it is my duty to chant  
 “ the praises of God. This is my *proper*  
 “ employment. In this I exercise myself.  
 “ Nor will I desert this my station, as long  
 “ as I live\*!” And in another place, the  
 same excellent person exclaims, in a flood of  
 pious transport and devout ecstasy; “ For  
 “ the future, O God, use me to whatever  
 “ thou pleasest! I cheerfully assent to thy  
 “ will, and serenely acquiesce in thine allot-  
 “ ments! I reject nothing that seemeth best  
 “ to thine infinite understanding! Lead me  
 “ where-ever thou wilt! Invest me with what  
 “ garment thou pleasest! Wilt thou have me

\* *Kai τις εξαρκει λογος, &c.* Arriani Epictetus, p. 90.  
Upton.

“ to fill a station of dignity or of obscurity ;  
“ to dwell in my native country, or go into  
“ exile ; to suffer poverty, or enjoy riches ;  
“ I will, in regard to all these things, vindicate thy dispensations before the whole  
“ world \*.”

Now what pleasure, what high, sublime, rapturous pleasure, is there in making such reflections as these ! What grateful satisfaction in the exercise of such affections and sentiments towards the blessed God ! Here is no gloom, no melancholy and dejection, but divine ecstasy, triumph, and exultation. Who has such reason to rejoice, as he who knows he is encircled by the divine Immensity, *filled with all the fulness of God*, supported, invigorated by the active all-comprehensive energy of the Divinity, and surrounded on every side by infinite Compassion, Goodness, and Love ! Who has such cause for exultation and triumph as the Christian, who sees the

\* Χρω μοι λοιπον, &c. p. 263.

*The Happiness of*  
immense Benignity and Philanthropy of God  
shine, with such heavenly radiance, in the  
person of Jesus Christ ! What a subject for  
sacred joy and rapture does the Gospel open  
to our view ! *Behold ! what manner of*  
*Love hath the Father bestowed upon us, that*  
*we should be called the sons of God ! Blessed be*  
*the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,*  
*who hath loved us, and given us everlasting*  
*consolation !* In what an amiable endearing  
light does the affecting History of the Mission  
and Ministry of our Lord, and all the evan-  
gelical blessings he communicated to the  
world, place the unexampled Goodness, and  
unutterable Love of God ! Here is an inex-  
haustible theme for all the sacred passions  
and emotions of the human heart ! No won-  
der that *Christians* are so frequently exhorted  
*to rejoice in the Lord, to rejoice evermore,*  
when there is such ample cause as this to in-  
flame every affection, and to kindle all the ten-  
der emotions and ingenuous sensibilities of

the

the human bosom. To view God in Christ reconciling the world to himself, to contemplate infinite Wisdom and infinite Goodness engaged in planning and executing the amazing scheme of Man's Redemption ; how does such a view affect the heart, penetrate the soul, and occupy all its powers with gratitude, love, and praise ! Fear, and gloom, and despondence, and every mean, abject, servile, ignoble passion disperse and vanish for ever, while the heart is under the full power of these glorious truths, and resign the soul to the soothing exercise of filial piety, ardent gratitude, and pleasing devout astonishment. Fear, and terror, and servility, may seize the souls of unenlightened *Heathens*, when they approach the shrines of their cruel and implacable *Deities*, but let such slavish passions for ever be exterminated from the Christian's breast, when he approaches the sacred presence of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Let him draw near the

throne

throne of the divine Clemency with liberal confidence, with grateful transports, and with all that generous warmth of affection which filial love can inspire.—Towards such a good being as the Christian's God, what a pleasing and delightful exercise is prayer ! To maintain an intercourse with our Maker, to pour the language of a grateful heart before him, and to testify to him the profound sense we have of his supreme goodness, and of our own felicity in the consciousness of his protection and guardianship of us and of ours, how delightful is this homage, how pleasing are such devotional acts and exercises ! To how much *pleasure* are they strangers, who are strangers to prayer ! What unspeakable *delights* have those lost, who never tasted the divine joys of communion with God !

C H A P. IV.

THE act of *resignation* to God is not a gloomy, but a most delightful performance. It must surely administer great comfort in an hour of pain and suffering to reflect, that these allotments are not the effect of chance and fatality, or the infliction of some cruel, fullen, and malignant Dæmon, but the dispensations of a merciful and compassionate Parent, the strokes of whose paternal rod are salutary, and whose friendly messengers all afflictions are. To what serene *composure* and *cheerful* acquiescence do these thoughts dispose the Christian! “ My “ faithful Creator knows what is best for “ me, better than I do for myself! No cala-“ mity can overwhelm me without his cogni-“ zance. No disease can invade me without “ his direction. That Being, before whom “ my heart lies disclosed, and who is per-“ fectly

“ feckly acquainted with the moral state and  
“ condition of my soul, knows what to assign  
“ me, and I am pleasingly convinced he will  
“ assign me nothing, but what seemeth best  
“ to his infinite Understanding. He afflicts  
“ not willingly, nor grieves the children of  
“ men. These distressing scenes are designed  
“ to moderate my too intense passion for this  
“ vain and fugitive life, to elevate my hea-  
“ ven-born desires to the contemplation of  
“ sublimer and nobler objects, to exercise my  
“ faith and my affiance in my God, and to  
“ put my mind in a proper frame and dispo-  
“ sition for a more vigorous and lively per-  
“ ception and fruition of spiritual and eternal  
“ things. These afflictions I now suffer are  
“ corrective, commissioned by my wise and  
“ good Parent to subserve my best interests,  
“ to represent to me, in a strong and strik-  
“ ing light, the odious nature and destruc-  
“ tive consequence of sin; to convince me  
“ of my frailty and dependence, and to direct

“ my

“ my views to the great supreme Arbiter of  
“ life and death. Thy will, therefore, O  
“ God, be done : for thou hast permitted me  
“ to cherish this delightful assurance, that  
“ thou *wilt*, that thou *canst*, do nothing,  
“ but what is wisest and best for thy depen-  
“ dent creatures !” The following *cheerful*  
and devout reflections of a celebrated *Hea-*  
*then* upon this subject, shew a virtuous dig-  
nity and elevation of soul that cannot fail to  
attract our love to such a character, and to  
excite our pious astonishment. “ May I be  
“ found, says he, at death, occupied in these  
“ worthy employments, that I may be able  
“ with virtuous confidence to appeal to God.  
“ Have I violated thy precepts ? Have I per-  
“ verted those faculties thou gavest me ? Have  
“ I abused the moral powers and capacities  
“ with which I have been endowed ? Did I  
“ ever utter any querulous murmurs against  
“ thee, or censure the procedures of thy go-  
“ vernment ? I have been sick—it was *thine*  
“ appoint-

" appointment—and so have others, but I  
 " willingly. I have been poor—it was *thine*  
 " *allotment*—but cheerful and happy in my  
 " poverty. I never filled a station of dig-  
 " nity—it was *thy* will I should not—for  
 " such an elevation I never breathed a single  
 " wish. Didst thou ever see me gloomy and  
 " full on this account? Did I not always  
 " approach thee with a serene countenance,  
 " prompt to execute thy command, and to  
 " obey the least intimation of thy pleasure?  
 " It is now thy will I should quit this ample  
 " theatre.—I depart,—paying thee my ar-  
 " dent gratitude, that thou hast graciously  
 " deigned to admit me to these amazing  
 " scenes, to behold thy works, and to attain  
 " the knowledge of thine administration \*."

What sooth ing delight do such acts of pious  
 resignation to God as these leave upon the  
 mind! How do they exhilarate our scat-

\* Ταῦτα ἐπιτιθέντες Σελωνούς εὐρεθήναι, &c. Arriani Epict.  
374. Upton.

tured spirits, clear our languor, and fill us with serene tranquillity, with conscious heart-felt satisfactions ! How does all gloomy anxiety and melancholy perturbation disperse in a moment, and calm serenity and peace occupy the bosom, when we consider that all the measures of the divine government are founded in unerring wisdom, perfect rectitude, and infinite goodness ! What placid composure doth it infuse into the soul to reflect, that a divine hand instils into our cup this sharp but salutary medicine, to heal the moral disorders of our minds, to expel the noxious dispositions and irregular affections of our hearts, and to recover us to an happy state of moral health, liberty, and enjoyment ! These acts of resignation and trust in God are inexpressibly delightful, dissipate all querulous complaints and gloomy terrors, and compose the soul into cheerful acquiescence. The very thought that God governs the world, is of itself abundantly sufficient

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ficient to chase away all the inquietude that infests human life. A full, fixed, deliberate, sacred persuasion, that my Creator is as solicitous for my welfare and happiness for both worlds, as if there were no other being besides myself in the whole universe, that was the object of his care, is a consideration that greatly dignifies and exalts the heart, elevates it infinitely above the reach of gloomy care and melancholy, and causes it to indulge the highest excesses of filial affection, love, and confidence, towards its munificent Parent, Benefactor, and Friend.

If this then is the character of the Deity, if this is the endearing relation that subsists between the blessed God and us, what must we think of the infernal doctrine of *Reprobation*; which represents God Almighty, by an absolute act of his arbitrary, uncontrollable sovereignty, consigning, by an irreversible decree, millions and millions of his immortal creatures to the everlasting endless tor-

ments

ments of hell, selecting five or six to happiness out of five or six thousand, and leaving all the rest to perish irrecoverably, being pre-destinated to remediless destruction from all eternity, millions of years before they *came* into existence, independently of their own conduct, by a decree, which it is not in their power to elude or escape. When this most execrable doctrine was first propagated in the Christian Church, I know not. I imagine it was either invented by St. *Austin*, or forged in the *Vatican*. It is not a doctrine, however, of the present age. I am sure it is a doctrine held in great and just horror and contempt by every rational and benevolent Christian; and, I hope, is banished from the Creed of every creature under heaven, that addresses its supreme Parent under the title of merciful and compassionate. Under what a character this represents the Father and Governor of mankind, I leave my reader to judge. I do not see how those, who believe it, if any

such can be found, can really be *happy* in the belief of it, even supposing themselves the distinguished favourites of heaven, as is generally the case. For admitting we were of this happy number, what ideas must we entertain of the *Justice* and *Goodness* of God for such partial and invidious distinctions; and with what *horror* and *commiseration* must we view the irrevocably destined misery of millions of our wretched fellow-creatures! A favourite child of a *numerous family*, on whom a fond *injudicious* parent lavished all his kindness, at the expence and to the injury of all the rest, must think very disfavourably of *such* a parent for *such* odious and partial distinctions, and the cruel neglect and treatment of its brothers, to a superior pre-eminence above whom it has no *natural* or *acquired* title, must fill it with cutting remorse and painful reflections.—But this is not the *Christian's God*. This is not the Being, whom in our prayers we invoke under the  
endearing

endearing apppellation of merciful, gracious, and good. The God, whom we serve, would have *all men* to be saved, and is *unwilling* that any of his immortal creatures should perish. Such a thought is extremely *pleasing* and *delightful* to every benevolent rational Christian, and makes the service we pay such a Being, an infinitely *pleasant, agreeable, and delectable* exercise. Thus doth Religion evince its intrinsic excellence and native amiableness, by appearing to be congenial to all our powers, to be the felicity and perfection of our natures, to be a most pleasing and delightful exercise, when performed under a deep and penetrating sense of the clemency and goodness of our Parent and Governor, and to produce the most sublime *pleasure* and sacred *joys* resulting from fervent acts of love, gratitude, and resignation to the Deity.

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## C H A P. V.

**I**F we examine the effects which Religion produces upon the soul, we shall be convinced that it is the source of mental happiness. It composes all our powers into a placid tranquility and conscious satisfaction, makes the mind pleased with itself, introduces a calm serene delight into the soul, harmonizes every affection, controuls every turbulent passion, and gives the happy votary the truest relish and enjoyment of his existence. What harmony, peace, joy, and self-complacence reign in that mind, over all whose powers Religion has shed her selectest influence! It is a stranger to the vehemence and fury of those wild exorbitant passions, which transport those who are under the cruel dominion and tyranny of them into such extravagancies, spread such uproar, perturbation, and anarchy in the soul, and lay the

the understanding, judgment, reflection, and conscience in such deplorable ruins. It is a stranger to those tumultuous appetites and raging lusts, which render those, whom they have enslaved, such miserable, abject, despicable vassals: which dethrone reason, transform a rational being into a brute, and efface all the marks of that glorious image, which God originally stamped upon the human soul. It is a stranger to those ominous fears and foreboding terrors, which haunt the minds of the depraved and abandoned, and harrow their souls with such keen remorse and distracting anguish. It is a stranger to discontentment, which is so unfriendly to our natures and so destructive of all internal felicity and peace. It is a stranger to all those irregular desires, vicious propensities, and depraved pursuits, which are incompatible with all tranquillity and self-enjoyment, inconsistent with the *law* of our nature, and, consequently, inconsistent with the *happiness* of

our nature. That happy mind, in which Religion has fixed her residence, is a perfect stranger to such turbulent scenes of inward confusion, as these lawless passions are sure to create. All is peace, and harmony, and tranquillity: sacred peace, uninterrupted harmony, undisturbed tranquility. All the lower passions and subordinate affections are in subjection to the nobler powers. Reason presides, conscience approves, and all the inferior faculties obey. The heart, the source of action, is pure, and all the streams, that flow from it through the *inferior* affections, are clear, lucid, unpolluted. The soul is devoted to God, aspires after him as its supreme good and happiness, maintains, by an holy heart and holy desires, an intimate communion with the great source of light, and love, and joy, and makes a solemn dedication and voluntary sacrifice of its affections at the divine altar. It leads all its passions and appetites captive to the throne of the

supreme

preme Majesty, renounces subjection to them, and consecrates all its powers to the service of God. It makes the will of God the great standard and measure of its actions, and the enjoyment of his complacential favour its ultimate aim, and the consummation of all its desires. It represses every passion that would damp or extinguish in its bosom the sacred love of God and virtue, and retard its fervid pursuit of glory, honour and immortality.

In an heart thus occupied, engaged in these pursuits, what divine ineffable peace and joy must reside? Such an heart is indeed, as the Apostle speaks, the temple of the living God; God dwelleth in it, illuminates it with the influence of his light and love, and sheds upon it the most sacred effulgence, the most mild and beatifying radiance. By means of such an intercourse with God, as Religion keeps up, the soul participates some of the scattered rays and emanations of the Divinity, which *fill it with joy and peace in*

*believing, which fill it with all the fulness of God, which give it some faint idea of the pure and perfect happiness the Father of this light possesseth, and infuses into all its perceptions and powers that peace of God which passeth all understanding.* O happy, thrice happy man, whoever thou art, who knowest, by experience, the sacred joys of religion, and canst bear thy testimony to this truth, that its ways are indeed ways of pleasantness, and all its paths peace ! Thou knowest the exalted happiness it imparts, too exalted for words adequately to describe, or imagination fully to represent ! Happy, happy Christian ! who hast chosen God for thy portion, Religion for thy guide, and Immortality for thy hope ! How serene, how peaceful is thy mind, how delightful are thy reviews, how delectable thy prospects ! What calm composure and self-satisfaction soothes thy spirits ! Thou knowest not what the turbulence and outrage of conflicting raging passions means !

means ! Thou art an happy, happy stranger to those lusts that *war in the soul*, and spread such scenes of misery and wretchedness there !

Thou art in happy ignorance of those dire furies that lash the guilty conscience, and of those tremendous terrors that seize and shake the sinner in his moments of reflection ! O what happiness dost thou possess in the friendship of God, and the gratulations of a good-heart ! Nothing can rob thee of thy mental satisfactions, nothing can exhaust or diminish the great indefectible source of them, they will flow on in one vast, various, lucid current, and recreate thee with pure and permanent felicity in every stage of life's short journey !

One of the greatest pleasures, I know, attending a religious life is, that it enables us to look up to God with a liberal virtuous confidence. Consider, for one moment, what it is to have the great God for our friend, and you will have a full conviction of the happy-

X happiness they taste, who have a conscious well-grounded assurance of it ! To have the clearing light of God's benign countenance diffused upon us, to be happy in the fruition of his approbation, *to have his love shed abroad in our hearts by his divine Spirit*, and, in consequence of the Christian covenant, to consider ourselves under the distinguishing title and character of *heirs of God*, and co-heirs with Jesus of an happy immortality, how exalted such a felicity ! His favour is life, his approbation is better than life ! The most raised enjoyments earthly objects yield, sink infinitely below this, are not worthy a comparison with this, so transcendent, so ineffable are the joys it inspires. O happy state, and happy soul, that can appeal to God for its sincerity, that can call to witness the great Spectator of its heart for the probity and integrity of it, and can attest before his throne, with humble filial confidence, its sincere, though imperfect obedience ! if our

heart

*heart condemn us not, says the Apostle, then have we confidence towards God.* And what exquisite joys, what transporting hopes, what divine consolations flow from such a *confidence*, those only know, who by a life of Religion have secured the divine friendship, and experienced the conscious happiness resulting from *such a friendship* !

## CHAP. VI.

WHAT renders a religious life so pleasant and delectable is, the congratulating applause of our consciences. Conscience is the voice of God, heaven's great vicegerent, stamping the laws of our Creator with its sanction, and giving a solemn pleasing attestation to every instance of our conformity to the divine prescriptions. Such is the tranquility, satisfaction, and peace that these principles throw upon the soul, that virtue is indeed its own reward, the very performance of a good action is its own sufficient

ficient retribution. " Whenever, says an excellent writer, an action is good and virtuous, it is not only natural, but carries with it a felicity flowing from, and essential to, the very nature of it. Paternal, conjugal, filial affection, are they not full of delight? Justice, friendship, beneficence, all the offices of humanity, and the whole train of virtues, does not the exercise of them administer the most sincere and lasting joy? The propensity there is in us towards them, and the satisfaction there is in doing them, does, in dispositions not depraved, lead almost irresistibly to the practice of them. We have, when we are about them, no boding, misgiving thoughts, no forbidding whispers, no secret reluctance. Comfort, complacency, and a gratulating conscience always accompany such actions." He that possesses *a conscience void of offence both towards God and towards man*, is possessed of a treasure of infinitely greater value than all the opulence of the

*Indies.*

*Indies.* A good heart is the greatest of all blessings, and worth all the crowns, and sceptres, and kingdoms, and erudition in the world. The joys that spring from a good heart, from an approving conscience, are obnoxious to no internal decay, liable to no external injury, they are sure to bless their possessor with the most pure, sacred, exalted happiness that can be enjoyed on this side the grave. *The good man is satisfied from himself,* and a good conscience is the source of this self-satisfaction. If *this* does not upbraid us, if this faithful principle doth not reproach us, our mental happiness is secure beyond all the possibility of time and change. What are the calumnies and censures of a cruel, hard-judging world to him, who enjoys the approbation of his heart and the applause of his conscience? What are the most opprobrious aspersions, the most inhuman indignities, the bloody-thirsty fury of tyrants and persecutors, the most ingenious torture that malice ever invented,

invented, or virtue ever endured, to him who is conscious of his virtue and innocence, to him who is conscious he is embarked in a good cause, and has the God of truth to support him, who knows in whom he hath believed and trusted, and is animated by a transporting persuasion, that the cause, in which he suffers, is the cause of God, and the cause of Religion. A good conscience hath met every human evil with firmness and intrepidity, and hath even caused its happy possessor to exult and triumph in the racks and wheels and engines and flames of bigotted rage and sanguinary zeal. A good conscience, such is the sacred fortitude it inspires, hath impressed joy on the dying countenance of the holy martyr, hath mitigated, alleviated, almost suspended, the torments they sustained, and even stripped *such* a death of above half its horrors. It is a good conscience, which is the unabating source of *joy unspeakable and full of glory*. Such delightful reflections,

such

such soothing satisfactions, such scenes of mental tranquillity and happiness Religion yields. When it is once cordially embraced, is once interwoven, so to speak, into the intimate essence and complection of the soul, it exalts and dignifies all its faculties, gives them a noble, generous elevation, dilates and expands its capacious powers with all the immense plenitude of mental joys, and diffuses a happiness that bears the nearest resemblance to what the blessed spirits themselves taste in the regions of immortality.

## C H A P. VII.

THE pleasures which Religion yields, are not like the pleasures of sense short, fugitive, and transitory. Animal pleasures soon pall upon the sense, are succeeded by satiety and disgust, and often leave dire remorse and cruel regret behind them. Not so the joys of Religion. They are pure and *lasting*,

lasting, will bear *reflecting upon*, which the *pleasures of sin, which are but for a season*, will not. The joys of Religion leave no sting behind them \*, they are accompanied and followed by no inward reproaches, by no uneasy perturbation, by no cutting anguish, or tormenting inquietude. The joys it yields are not sullied by impure passions, interrupted by external disappointments, do not cloy and satiate with repetition, but flow on in a regular, uniform, full stream, refreshing the mind, recreating the spirit, and perpetually clearing, animating, and invigorating the heart with divine consolations.

Doth a sinful life supply such joys as these? No! far, far from it! The sinner is miserable wherever he goes, for a condemning conscience follows him wherever he goes: could he remove to the farthest verge of the creation, the furies of a guilty conscience would haunt and pursue him through every inter-

\* — *nocet empto dolore voluptas.*

*Hor.*

vening region. For the mind, the seat of misery, is not changed with every changing clime. The mind continues the *same*, his evil dispositions and depraved affections do not diversify his inward wretchedness. Amidst the brilliancy of a court, amidst the splendor of greatness, amidst the pomp and pageantry of magnificent cities, amidst the servile adulation of fawning sycophants, amidst the luxurious banquet, the gilded dome, all the scenes of voluptuousness, he is a mean miserable creature. All this exterior show and parade suspend not the torments of a bad heart, of a bad conscience. He may rove from one guilty scene to another, interchange and modify his amusements to infinity, traverse a circle of pleasure, and dissipation, and profligacy, and universal licentiousness, yet *think* he must—he must have his sober intervals—reflection will return—conscience will emerge from that abyss of lust and drunkenness in which it hath been plunged—and

what are the sinner's sentiments *then*, of the courses he hath been pursuing? What are his thoughts of his past actions in such a moment? —such a moment will come—what are the emotions and sensibilities of his heart, when all the past scenes of guilt crowd at once into his shuddering remembrance?—O horror! O distraction! He finds an hell in his bosom, for he finds God is his enemy. He finds he hath been degrading his nature, debasing himself below the brutes, ruining his constitution, destroying his health, filling his body with the seeds of many dreadful and loathsome distempers, extinguishing his reason, dethroning conscience, dishonouring God, disgracing the Gospel, and for a number of years been accumulating an immense fund of wretchedness for time and eternity. He startles at the recollection of his cruel disobedience to his affectionate parents, is shocked at the reflection of his flagrant abuse of the advantages he enjoyed in early life, and can-

not,

not, dare not, look forward towards the dread tribunal of his Judge, where he must *shortly* appear to receive the things done in the body ?

How eminently do the *pleasures* of Religion appear, when contrasted with such complicated *wretchedness* ? What a faithful picture is here exhibited of the misery and final ruin of a sinful life ! Such deformity and turpitude should serve as a *foil* to illustrate its beautiful and divine *opposite*. If we would not be in *such* a situation for ten thousand worlds, then Religion, Religion, if we have the wisdom to embrace it, will effectually preserve us from all this unutterable variety of wretchedness : Religion, Religion, is the only eligible course, the truest wisdom, man's highest, noblest happiness for both worlds ! We see that a life of sin will not bear a review ; that it is destructive of all our valuable interests, that *vice* and *misery* are inseparable. We see that no man can be *happy*,

who is enslaved to any one vice, and that the laws of God and nature forbid he should be so. So that Religion, in every view, approves itself as our supreme good, as perfective of human nature, and of all the raised felicities that human nature is capable of sensing.

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## C H A P. VIII.

**C**ONSIDER, also, that health, fame, reputation, character, are connected with the practice of Religion. The reason I mention health among the blessings that ordinarily result from the practice of Religion is, because temperance is one of the great lessons it teaches: and how friendly, how salutary this most excellent virtue is to our nature, I need not mention. What miseries do intemperance and debauchery entail upon their unhappy votaries! What cruel shocking diseases do they inflict! Diseases, which

which do not merely *terminate* in those, whose vicious excesses have occasioned them, but are transmitted down through a long series of successive innocent sufferers. How many human miseries doth a life of Religion prevent ! How many evils doth it preclude, which render life a scene of wretchedness, and far, very far, from being desirable ! Some of the antients speak of a *sound mind in a sound body* \*, as being the summit of human felicity. I am sure this *greatest of blessings* nothing but the practice of Religion can effect. For Religion curbs and restrains those appetites, the boundless gratification of which impairs the health, undermines the constitution, embitters life, accelerates old age, and brings on untimely death. So that the preservation and establishment of *health*, without which this world is a prison, and the present scene of being as gloomy as *Erebus*, the enjoyment of cheerful days, and the fruition of a long and happy

\* *Mens sana in corpore sano.* *Ju<sup>o</sup>.*

life, all these striking considerations should have irresistible charms with every considerate young person, deliberately to embrace O Religion, the liberal donor of all these signal distinguished blessings.

The certain acquisition of fame, character, and reputation, is an *end* great enough to recommend any *means* that will infallibly secure it. To be happy in the love and esteem of the world, to maintain such an universal character as endears us not only to the circle of our acquaintance and friends, or to those merely within the narrow sphere of our influence, but to persons of all parties and denominations; to have such a character established as makes us respected and caressed by the world, induces others to confide in our known integrity, to commit to our fidelity their most sacred interests, to repose in our conscientious probity the most secure affiance, and to acquiesce in our upright decision of any intricate and embarrassed circum-

stances, in the arbitration of which, duty and moral obligation are requisite ; to establish such an amiable character, and pass through life with such a fair unspotted reputation, is the most illustrious honour that *man* can enjoy, or the *world* can bestow. What can transcend the felicity of being caressed, loved, and honoured by the wise and good ? What pleasure has this world in it equal to the exalted pleasure of a virtuous character ? What a miserable despicable thing is it to incur the infamy and contempt of the world, as vice is sure to do ? Can there be a more wretched circumstance happen to a thinking being, than to be studiously shunned and avoided by every friend to Religion and Virtue ? To have parents recount their vices to their children to excite in them abhorrence, to be the pest of society, the bane of families, the execration of the parents of ruined innocence, monsters of drunkenness, debauchery, and sensuality, and to be held in de-

testation by every person of character and virtue, that is, by every person whose good word and friendship are worth valuing?—So that in this capital respect virtue has charms for youth, worthy to attract their admiration and love, worthy to excite in their breast the most sacred passion for a celestial inhabitant, who diffuses with a liberal hand such a profusion of blessings o'er human life. Religion will recompense all the pains we bestow in the most assiduous culture of it. Honour and renown are in her right hand, peace and tranquillity in her left. *These* she holds forth to us with engaging smiles, with celestial attractive sweetness, with every soft endearing blandishment, that can incite us to seize the glorious offered prize. Religion hath rewards, even in this world, supposing no hereafter, sufficient to stimulate all our generous efforts to obtain them, and which will infinitely more than compensate all our activity and anxiety in the acquisition of them.

them. It will make life *pleasant* and *delectable* from the reputation and honour that will accrue to us from the practice of it; it will secure us a dignity, a distinction, an elevation, infinitely more illustrious and honourable than riches or ambition can ensure, and, in this signal respect, make life a scene of sublime *pleasure*, and the noblest *satisfactions*.

## C H A P. IX.

**A**NOTHER happy circumstance, which renders a religious life so *pleasurable* is, that contentment and chearfulness it infuses into the mind. What inquietude can distress his mind, who is convinced that infinite Goodness presides at the helm of universal government. What uneasy cares can oppress, what tormenting anxiety can corrode his spirit, who is pleasingly conscious, that his interests are deposited in the hands of supreme

preme Mercy, and that all the procedures of the divine administration are founded in the happiness of the universe. Who has equal pretensions to mental tranquillity and cheerfulness with the pious Christian ? He, who knows that God has made with him an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure. He, who knows that God, who spared not his only Son, but delivered him up for his everlasting benefit, will also, along with this unspeakable blessing, the gift of his Son, freely give him all things ! What evil can invade the sacred peace of that breast, which is resigned to God, and all whose powers are composed into a perfect placid submission to the divine appointments ! What true satisfaction and solid contentment doth it supply, to reflect that God *wills* nothing but what is best for us, assigns us no situation and circumstance, but what appear best to his infinite and unerring Understanding ; and that we can secure his approbation in *any* state and condition

condition whatever, by a faithful and conscientious discharge of its respective duties. The noble and exalted fabric of that soul's tranquillity and happiness, which serenely acquiesces in the divine dispensations, is erected on a basis which all the storms and tempests of this world can never shake or subvert. He, whose desires and hopes center in God, who only needs to *discover* the divine will in order to *conform* to it, who cheerfully *follows* where-ever Providence leads \*, and whose devout ejaculation in every varying scene of this chequered life is, Thy will, O God, be done ! He, whose heart is thus fixed, trusting in God, hath his happiness fixed upon a rock, which the waves and billows of life's troubled ocean may, indeed, lash and assail, but all

\* Αγαθὸς δέ μ' ὁ Ζεύς, καὶ σὺ γ' η πεπρωμένη,  
Οποιος ποσὶν εἴης διατεταγμένος.  
Ως εὔφορας γ' αονος· νν δέ μη θελω,  
Κατος γενομένος, οὐδεν ηττον εὔφορας.

Arriani Epict. Upton, 737.

their

their rage is impotent \*. The frowns and censures of the world, the aspersions and calumnies of the envious and malevolent, make no impression on the serenity of that soul, which hath chosen God for its portion, Truth for its aim, the Scriptures for its study, and Heaven for its hope. Such a soul is not elated by prosperous, or dejected by adverse, fortune. Its happiness doth not veer and change with every fluctuation of human things. Its mental fruition is a calm, uniform flow of happiness, advancing in one beautiful, consistent tenor, instilling pure delight, sacred joy, refreshing consolation, in all the various emergencies and occurrences of this life. But what tranquillity can reside in that breast, which is distracted by passion, corroded by envy, tormented by the dæmon

\* *Ille, velut rupes vastum quæ prodit in æquor,  
Obvia ventorum furiis, expostraque ponto,  
Vim cunctam atque minas perfert cœlique marisque,  
Ipsa immota manens.*      *Virgil, Aeneid. X. 693.*

X

of lust, devoured with avarice, inflated with pride, deluged in sensuality, and torn by the adverse tendency of a thousand conflicting passions? In no soul can true, solid mental happiness be found, but where Religion hath fixed her sacred abode. All *other* pursuits, every *other* course of life, that hath not Religion for its end and aim, are so many deviations from that great *line* which God Almighty, at our formation, marked out for the *path* of us all, are so many violations to the fundamental laws of our natures; and the further we advance in these devious walks, the farther we remove from the great center of our supreme good and supreme felicity. All the *united* experience of all the *united* ages of the world, has given its *united* attestation to this great truth, That vice is misery, destructive of all our valuable interests, subversive of all substantial peace, comfort, and tranquillity. And all the past ages of the world, the civilized and the uncivilized,

civilized, all orders and ranks of men in all ages, the sagacious philosopher and the illiterate barbarian, all, all unite in faithfully transmitting to every successive generation of short-lived mortals this cardinal truth, " **VIRTUE ALONE IS HAPPINESS BELOW.** Virtue is its own reward, the supreme good of human life, the sole parent of all true and permanent felicity. With regard therefore to the happy effects Religion produces upon the mind, which are calm composure, benign tranquillity, unabating cheerfulness, placid resignation, complacent self-satisfaction, it demonstrably evinces this fundamental truth, That Religion is the only path that conducts mortals to the temple of true happiness.

## C H A P. X.

THE exercise of the benevolent and social affections is another source of the purest mental pleasure. The *happiness* of God flows from his *goodness*. God is infinitely *happy* because infinitely *good*. The universal diffusion of happiness to numberless beings in numberless worlds, returns by a reflex act upon the great Original; and the happiness of his creatures is the happiness of the Creator. The vast all-comprehensive survey of all his dependent creatures, formed by his power, supported by his providence, and rejoicing in his beneficence, fills the Divinity with ineffable complacential delight. *Human* happiness, in this capital instance, is placed on the same basis with the *divine*. The exercise of benevolence communicates the most exquisite felicity the human heart can feel. Benevolence is eminently one of those virtues that

that reward themselves in the performance. If there were no *future* rewards annexed to it, the elegant pleasures and delicate sensibilities it yields, are sufficient motives to the culture and improvement of this most amiable virtue. How delightful is the review of benevolent actions ! Of having relieved a real object of compassion, of having raised the drooping head of sorrowing virtue, of having rescued innocence from the jaws of destruction, of having made worthy necessitous families, who suffered in modest silence, the abode of grateful transport and the cheerful scene of every felicity, of having poured the balm of consolation into the wounds of the afflicted mourner, of succouring merit in distress, patronizing genius and learning in penury and indigence, alleviating misery, soothing and softening the rigours of human infelicity, diminishing the evils and sufferings of those around us, mitigating and suspending their sorrows by friendly advice and seasonable charities,

charities, visiting the fatherless and widow in their afflictions, and rendering all worthy objects within the sphere of our influence as happy as possible ! What a divine pleasure do these worthy principles and truly godlike dispositions yield ! The consciousness of having dispelled the sorrows and sufferings of several worthy persons and worthy families, by a trifling charitable donation, of extricating them from their difficulties, enabling them, by seasonable assistance, to disembarass their affairs, prosecute their designs, and concert such measures as may furnish out a scene of happiness for *themselves*, and probably happiness for their *families*, through a long series of successive generations ; the consciousness of being eyes to the blind, feet to the lame, the friend of suffering virtue, the patron of distress, the asylum of the widow and orphan, the first to promote any scheme and institution that has the relief of human wretchedness for its object ; the consciousness of having

an heart actuated by such principles and dispositions as these, of having an heart that incircles in its ample benevolence the universal good of all mankind, supplies an happiness the greatest that the human bosom can enjoy, the greatest that the Deity himself, in the present scene of being, can communicate to mortals. Benevolence is the fairest copy of the divine Original, for God is Love! Benevolence is man's transcendent happiness, for it is God's transcendent happiness. He acquires the nearest resemblance to the Divinity, who is most assimilated to him in the temper and disposition of his mind; and he is blessed with the fruition of the most consummate felicity, who makes his happiness to flow from the same principles from which the happiness of God is deduced. "In nothing do mortals, says *Cicero*, approach *nearer* the immortal Gods than in doing good." What pleasure doth a person of opulence enjoy, when God hath given him a good heart to

make

make a benevolent use of it ! The world hath not an happier being in it than a rich ~~X~~ man with benevolent dispositions. How is such a beneficent character loved, admired, caressed, honoured, and venerated by the world ! Adored in life, and his memory held in everlasting honour. Riches joined with beneficence command universal respect ; without it, universal contempt. How amiable an institution, therefore, is the Gospel ! How much doth this scheme approve itself to be the offspring of the God of Love, and perfective of our truest happiness, by inculcating, in every page, upon its professors, this most amiable virtue as its grand cardinal principle, and the discriminating characteristic of a Christian. How much hath the Gospel consulted the *happiness* of human nature, by inspiring the heart with *benevolent* principles ! The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ knew that our *highest* happiness resulted from the cultivation of charity and

love; a regard therefore to *our* happiness, most benevolently induced him, in this new dispensation, to stamp charity, the true fountain of the truest joy, with his authoritative seal and signet, by the most emphatical solemn sanction to render it peculiarly and indispensably obligatory upon *Christians*; connecting, you see, our happiness with our duty, and annexing the *noblest* happiness to the *noblest* duty. One of the most elegant apophthegms in all antiquity is that beautiful ~~maxim~~ of our Lord, *It is more blessed to give than to receive.* By the Apostle's manner of quoting it, it should seem that this was a common and favourite saying of our Lord, *Remembering the words of our Lord, how he said, It is more blessed, &c.* The intention of this elegant moral aphorism is to show, that the *pleasure* of the *benefactor* is greater than the *pleasure* of the *beneficiary*. That the sensibilities of the person relieved by a charitable benefaction, however grateful, however

however penetrated with the deepest sense of his obligations, are not so delicate and exquisite, as those sensations which the action, and the consciousness of it, impart to the benefactor. One might, *otherwise*, be at a loss, when present at the distribution of useful charities, which to congratulate, the *worthy* person dispensing, or the *worthy* objects receiving, did not this observation of our Lord evince, That the pleasure of the benevolent donor far transcends the pleasure of those he benefits. “ Is it needful to shew, says a fine writer\*, that benevolence and charity yield more pleasure, more comfort and complacency, than a contrary disposition? Is any thing to be said, or imagined, in behalf of envy, hatred, malice, revenge? The very bitterness of life, and the bane of all enjoyment. Even an indifference, a mere want of concern for the welfare of our fellow-crea-

\* Mr. Balguy.

tures, must be an *unnatural, insipid, joyless* state of mind; as being indeed repugnant to the frame and first principles of human nature. But universal benevolence is a constant source of pure satisfaction, and sincere delight: most pleasing in the exercise, and no less grateful in the remembrance. This is an enjoyment not only worthy of men and angels, but of God himself, who is therefore infinitely blessed because infinitely good. By opening our hearts to the whole creation, we effectually consult our own bliss; a bliss commencing that moment, and enduring for ever. Hereby we secure an interest in every good that befalls, and the *public* prosperity is *ours*. By rejoicing at the happiness of others, we are sure to partake with them, and the more we sympathize, the larger is our share." The exercise therefore of the benevolent and social affections, love, beneficence, and charity, renders a life of Religion peculiarly happy, as these worthy and amiable dispositions

tions are productive of the most pure, elegant, exquisite pleasures, of the sublimest, noblest, mental enjoyments.

## C H A P. XI.

THE happiest families in this world are religious families. What a happy scene Religion spreads around it, is best seen in a little harmonious society, the bond and cement of whose union is piety. What a delightful spectacle, a spectacle which Angels, and Jesus, and the blessed God, from the regions of immortality survey with pleasure; to see each individual, by the culture of the best dispositions, desirous to promote the general good, anticipating their parents commands, striving to lessen, as much as possible, the pressure of their infirmities, exerting every generous effort to communicate happiness to a parent's bosom, instilling joy and tranquillity and satisfaction into their minds,

at a time of life when most they need consolation, carefully avoiding every thing that would wound a parent's peace, studying, by all the tender expressions of filial piety, to alleviate their sorrows, by a generous affectionate condolence and sympathy, sharing their distresses, making their *parent's God their God*, proposing their example a model for their imitation, forming their conduct upon the same worthy principles and maxims with theirs, and, by every instance of duty and obedience, making the decline of life to them a calm, cheerful, serene evening. The greatest satisfaction that parents can enjoy in the closing scenes of life, is to see in their children amiable virtuous dispositions. What transport doth a fond parent's bosom feel in seeing his children prefer such friendships, and choose such connexions, as will, through the blessing of the Almighty, lay the foundation of happiness here and hereafter ! I do not think it possible for an higher happiness

to

to be tasted in this scene of being, than what a parent feels on such occasions. *The virtue of children is the crown of hoary hairs.* How are the pains and sufferings of old age suspended, and decrepitude, indisposition, loss of health, loss of appetite and all its variety of misery, soothed and softened by the dutiful obedience and virtue of good children, by the pleasing consciousness of their steadily pursuing the paths of Religion, reverencing the holy Scriptures, delighting in religious ordinances, loving prayer and reading, and studying the improvement of their minds in useful knowledge. Of all this happiness in families, of all these delectable scenes in the decline of life, of all this comfort from virtuous dutiful children, Religion, Religion is the sole fountain. All this domestic happiness flows from Religion ! O what a powerful incentive is this to parents to give their children a religious education, and to imbue their tender minds with the sacred odour of these divine

divine principles, as ever they are desirous to reap this fair and copious harvest of happiness in the close of life, as ever they are desirous to enjoy a calm, tranquil, cheerful evening of life, as ever they are desirous to live happily and die comfortably. And what a cogent motive is this also to children, to infix indelibly in their minds the useful instructions of their parents, to make them the amiable directory of their conduct, to erect *their* happiness on the same basis on which their religious parents founded their happiness, and by the cultivation of the same principles they saw their parents cultivate, by implanting in themselves the habits they acquired, assiduously endeavour to attain that signal felicity, in the fruition of which they beheld their parents so long and so eminently happy.

## C H A P. XII.

HOW delectable and happy is a religious life, when it is considered with what distinguished privileges and signal blessings, the noblest causes of the noblest joy, the Gospel hath invested us. What a subject, what an inexhaustible subject for joy, cheerfulness, exultation, and triumph doth the Gospel exhibit ! At the auspicious incarnation of our blessed Lord the heavenly choirs in transported accents repeated, Peace ! Peace ! on earth, good-will towards men ! I pity those, from my soul I pity them, whose gloomy minds and gloomy systems the transporting discoveries of the Gospel cannot wake into sacred cheerfulness and Christian ecstasy. God is Love. Jesus is Love. The Gospel is a system of Love ; calculated to inspire us with exhilarating hopes and animating prospects. The Gospel is not a doctrine accord-

ing to melancholy. It was designed to chase all melancholy horrors both from the mind and from the grave. It inspires with *joy and peace in believing*. He, who has a blessed immortality before him, cannot be dispirited and sunk in the gloom of dejection and pusillanimous despondence. He, who sees a glorious wreath of unfading bliss hung up full in his view to fire him with generous emulation, and is conscious that, by the vigorous exertion of his virtuous endeavours, he can secure this glorious prize, cannot, with these prospects, with these assurances, court a sullen cheerless gloom, and wrap his mind in the pensive sable shades of inconsolable melancholy. It would be impious, ungenerous, unchristian to do this. The Gospel was calculated, from its sacred Fountain to distil o'er human life the purest streams of the divinest joy. To disperse every thing unfriendly to our natures, to dissipate our sorrows, to console us in an hour of distress,

to animate us with heavenly comfort, and to inspire us in this frail life's pilgrimage with the most rapturous strains of the most rapturous joy. Let not your heart be troubled, says our Lord. Ye believe in God, and ye believe in me. My peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you: Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. If ye loved me, ye would *rejoice*, because I go to the Father. Rejoice in the Lord, says St. *Paul*, yea, I say unto you, rejoice. Who has such cause for exultation as the Christian! O what sacred transports of sacred joy result from considering ourselves as the heirs of God, and the coheirs with Jesus of the same blessed immortality! What vigour and animation are excited by the explicit promises of divine assistance in all our difficulties! What comfort and peace of mind flow from the assured forgiveness of sins upon sincere repentance! What excesses of holy joy do

the

the grand discoveries of the Gospel inspire! The clear revelation of ETERNAL LIFE, the proposed reward of persevering holiness, enforcing every duty, repeated in every page, is a doctrine sufficient to banish all our sorrows, alleviate all our pains, suspend all our sufferings, and to expand and enrapture our bosom with ecstasies of love, gratitude, and triumph. O'er the New Testament *Justin Martyr* breaks out into this ecstatic exclamation: This have I found to be the only safe and useful philosophy \*. The design of Christianity is to inspire its professors with religious joy; but the design of many systems, that have pretended to be founded upon it, is to inspire men with cheerless melancholy. He who expatiates o'er the vast and various blessings of the Covenant of Grace, and considers himself as personally in-

\* Ταῦτην μονην ἐνρίσκου φιλοσοφίαν ασφαλν τε και συμφορον. *Justin Mart.* edit. Paris, p. 225.

terested in them for time and eternity, will think it impossible that any intelligent being, however disposed to gloom and dejection, can really review and revolve this blessed religion with cold insensibility, with a mind dark and sombrous and fullen, incapable by nature, by habit, or by system, of feeling the divine force and energy of these *animating* truths and glorious *transporting* assurances.

## C H A P XIII.

RELIGION is the wisest happiest art we can learn ; for it will teach us not only to live happily, but to die comfortably. It will yield us the best supports at a time when we shall have most need of supports. This faithful companion travels with us through life, nor quits us when we die. It attends us when every thing else hath deserted us. In a dying hour its comforts and consolations are greatest. Amidst this gloom it shines

shines forth with redoubled lustre, infuses a cheerful ray into the dark valley of the shadow of death, and enables us to enter it with songs of victory and triumph.—Dying is, abstractedly, an awful event. To exchange time for eternity, to close our eyes for ever upon this world, to bid a long, long farewell to all the objects of our fond affections, and to launch from the port of human life into an unknown world, that will never, never have an end, is unutterably solemn.—But is there nothing that disarms death of its sting, and strips the grave of its gloomy horrors?—  
Yes, O transporting thought! Religion does this. O death! where is *now* thy sting! O grave! where is *now* thy victory! Thanks be to God who hath given us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ! O Religion! how sacred is thy power! How sovereign thy influence! Nor time, nor the events of time, nor the stroke of death, can solicit thy joys, fully thy divine lustre, or pollute those pure refreshing

refreshing streams which thou emittest to alay our thirst, and exhilarate our languor ! Religion enables the good Christian to quit this world without a sigh, to leave its illusive visionary joys without regret, and to bid an eternal adieu to it with christian firmness, serenity, and triumph. O how delectable are the prospects it spreads before the Christian in his expiring moments ! In the article of death, how delightful is the review of a good life ! Within the full attraction of that transcendent ineffable happiness that awaits him, with what decency, honour, and applause doth he make his exit from the stage of this life : even, amidst the painful dissolution of soul and body, feeling all the plenitude of the divinest satisfactions, all the excesses of a mental joy, *unspeakable and full of glory !*

## C H A P. XIV.

**I**NTO the next scene of being let us pursue Religion, and see what event awaits her there. In the human bosom our good Creator hath enkindled the ardent desire of immortality, and he will as certainly satisfy this desire as he first infused it. This divine principle will triumph over the ruins of the grave, and flourish in immortal existence. What glorious hopes hath the Gospel lighted up in the Christian's breast. Christians are more than merely the *expectants*, they are the *heirs*, of immortality! What transporting prospects hath our Lord exhibited before us. The objects, after which he hath taught us to aspire, are no less than glory, honour, and immortality! The curtain, which interposed between time and eternity, is *now* dropped, and the delectable scene extends in one vast, various, unbounded prospect, far, far beyond the veil which once intervened. How free

from

from dubious error and cruel uncertainty are the discoveries of the Gospel ! with what hesitation and diffidence do all the celebrated sages of antiquity, who had only the light of reason to direct their enquiries, discourse on this subject ! What unhappy mixtures of fable and fiction chequer their beautiful disquisitions on this topic ! Futurity to them was enveloped in the dire uncomfortable shades of impervious gloom ; the philosophic eye, that laboured to pierce this gloom, was obscured and weakened by the poetic errors and absurdities of hoary and venerable antiquity. The Gospel is the only System, that hath exhibited life and immortality in a rational unclouded light. The revelation of this grand doctrine is its distinguishing excellence, its unrivalled glory, and discriminates it from every Religion the world ever saw. What an *additional* weight, therefore, hath this blessed institution thrown into the scale of virtue ! What infinite attractions hath Religion

ligion now for her votaries ! The promise of the life that now is, and of the life which is to come ! The Christian's view is not circumscribed within the contracted bounds of this vain and visionary life. This world is not the sepulchre of all his hopes. He affects sublimer things, aspires after nobler objects, and gives a free and liberal scope to his immortal powers in expatiating over those boundless unutterable joys which God hath prepared for persevering virtue. It is in eternity Religion is crowned : it is in eternity her brows are encircled with a diadem of glory ineffable. O happy, happy world ! where blessed angels and glorified spirits shall hail the introduction of the good Christian, hail his approach with songs of victory and acclamations of triumph, and attend him with celestial ovations to his appointed mansion ! Think, how ecstatic and ravishing must be the beatific vision of the ever-blessed God, when he visibly displays his glory, before which

which the cherubim, seraphim, and all the infinite orders of the celestial inhabitants fall prostrate, and in the transports of adoring rapture cry out, *Holy! holy! holy! Lord God Almighty.* The happiness of heaven is comprised in one single expression. *They shall see God!* How many vast unutterable ideas doth this short sentence include! No man, says our Lord, has seen the Father. Such a flood of glory, poured upon frail mortality, would overwhelm all our powers. We shall have *new* faculties that will enable us to sustain this immensely glorious sight, and to imbibe all that inconceivable bliss which such a spectacle infuses. Think, what it is to reflect the emanations of the divine glory, *to behold as in a glass,* to use the Apostle's divine language, *the glory of the Lord, and to be changed into the same image from glory to glory.* Think what it is to have *immediate* communion with the Father of our spirits, to be pure in his purity, wise

in his wisdom, happy in his happiness, to feel at all our senses and perceptions the influx of his light and truth and love, and to be admitted into the perfect fruition of his sacred presence, where is fulness of joy, and pleasures infinitely surpassing all our most enlarged ideas and conceptions!

## C H A P. XV.

WOULD you know the happiness that crowns a religious life, turn your thoughts to the auspicious morning of the resurrection. The resurrection of the dead is the grand catastrophe and consummation of all sublunary things. Here the scene of mortality closes. Here the great *drama* of human life winds up. At this great period time ends, eternity begins. At this glorious æra time is swallowed up in the boundless ocean of eternity. The resurrection is the commencement of all our happiness; the auspicious date of an happiness that will flow

on

on in a clear, full, lucid, spreading, endless stream through all the rolling ages of a boundless immortality ! The blessed dawn of the morning of the resurrection will see us for ever released from the prison of a frail mortal body, and vindicated into the perfect liberty and perfect happiness of the sons of God. This happy propitious morn will rise upon us, O how changed, how transformed ! this corruptible vested with incorruption, this mortal cloathed with immortality ! Adorned with a resplendent heavenly robe of ineffable radiance, all our intellectual powers alert, active, vigorous, no longer oppressed with an incumbent load of earth and sense, clouded by the intervention of animal affections, and impeded in their operations by the inert accidents of flesh and blood. What light, and truth, and knowledge will then break upon us ! How will all our former difficulties vanish, and the clouds and darkness, that now envelop our minds, in a moment disperse for

ever! O glorious hour! when we shall wake into new life, turn our eyes upon the vaulted heaven, and see a glorious triumphant scene, our blessed Lord descending with ten thousand of his saints, to adorn the temples of all his virtuous followers with a wreath of immortal amaranth. What sensibilities, what emotions, greater than tongue can express, greater than thought can form, must this glorious spectacle excite in the glowing bosom of the good Christian! This is the event which was the object of all his hopes. This is the day for which he passionately aspired. This, this is the glorious period, which amidst all the sorrows and sufferings of mortal life inspired him with animating consolation, and made him more than conqueror through him that had loved him. O how will the good Christian hail his descending Saviour! With what songs of triumph will he felicitate his illustrious advent! O how will he congratulate himself, and those who

stand

stand round him, that he who declared *he would come*, is now arrived to usher them into complete salvation. What a mixture of tumultuous passions will then struggle in our bosoms, love, gratitude, admiration, ecstasy, when we behold this sight, when we awake from our long adamantine slumbers, start from the silent clay-cold grave, open our eyes into eternity, and see all this flood of glory bursting upon us ! What tears of joy, if the blessed can weep, will gush from our eyes at seeing such a sight, in beholding such a vast, immensely glorious scene, at *seeing him as he is*, with ineffable sweetnes, with complacent benignity and love in his countenance, applauding his followers victorious faith, their unshaken perseverance, stretching forth his hand, then pronouncing over them that transporting sentence, Well done ! good and faithful servants ! enter ye into the joy of your Lord ! Upon hearing a sentence, which makes immortality his own, will not the

Christian

Christian, in a flood of transport, like *Scipio*, embrace his natal foil, and hail the happy world his virtues won. Ecstatic thought ! that we shall *now* through all eternity converse with the divine compassionate *Jesu*, be admitted into the intimacies of his love, compose a part of the brilliant, illustrious, ineffably magnificent train of happy spirits, accompany him wherever he goes, attend him to whatever places and regions he visits in the boundless expanse of God's heaven, and be deriving from him larger and larger measures of knowledge and happiness through all the revolving ages of an eternal world. Blessed abodes ! where sin and sorrow never enter, where all human imperfection is for ever unknown, whose inhabitants are harassed with no evils, excruciated with no pain, haunted by no anxieties, seduced by no temptations, privileged from the shafts of death, where *God wipes all tears from their eyes*, and where harmony, peace, and love reign

reign for ever. Happy seats ! in which we shall mingle with the general assembly of all the wise and good that ever lived, be associated to the collective community of those virtuous happy spirits of whom we have read, in which we shall meet our worthy ancestors, pious parents, affectionate brothers, amiable children, all our virtuous relations, friends, and acquaintance, meet to part no more for ever, and mutually form a friendship and society that will last as long as immortality endures. Blessed mansions ! in which we shall have an eternity before us, in which we shall live, when perhaps it will be forgot that ever we animated such a body as the present, or lived in such a world as the present.

## C H A P. XVI.

**T**HINK then, reader, for God's sake, for thy own sake, I beseech thee, think what it is to forfeit immortality, to disinherit thyself of what is thy proper, natural, assured possession,

(+) possession, as the *heir of God*, to exclude thyself from an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that never fades away, to lose such an inheritance as this—for what—for a few mean, abject gratifications, in a short and fugitive life, that will soon come to an end with the youngest of us; to barter such a glorious reversion for a few brutal short-lived pleasures, hardly worthy to be styled pleasures. What folly and madness ever equalled this! To part with heaven for earth, a blessed immortality for a sinful mortality! to sacrifice all the blessedness of a never ending eternity for a few transitory moments, for a vain and visionary life, for the vain and visionary *pleasures of sin*, which are, at longest, *but for a season*. Were all the philosophers, orators, and divines, that ever lived, assembled together, they could not sufficiently expose the folly and distraction of mortals in this great concern. Born as we are all to glory, honour, and immortality, and yet bury all our

native hopes in the narrow putrid grave of this life, what a prostitution is this of our heaven-born powers, what an affront to the ever-blessed God, who kindled in our bosoms these desires, and would as certainly have satisfied them as he kindled them ; to what a low, abject, despicable, groveling condition do we vilely and voluntarily degrade ourselves from the noblest summit of the noblest elevation. O ignominious disgraceful fall ? Born to flourish in eternal existence, yet choosing to become the victims of eternal death ! O thou once exalted creature, the son of God, and the heir of immortality, thou, in whom there once resided whatever can to thought or sense be formed great, glorious, honourable, dignified, illustrious, how art thou fallen ! how art thou lost ! Thou hast sold thy glorious birth-right for a painted cloud, a gilded trifle, a fleeting shadow, a gay, illusive, short-lived dream of pleasure that will soon be disturbed ; thou hast

**hast** forgot, thou hast chosen to forget, thy celestial origin, thy Father, and thy Father's house, in which there are many mansions provided for the reception of his virtuous obedient children; and unmindful of what thou art, and of what thou wilt be, thou hast ingloriously acquiesced in the mean and miserable accommodations of an *inn*, burying in eternal oblivion all thoughts of thy native *country*, and thy native *home*. O that men were wise, that they would but regard this, that they would but consider their latter end. O that creatures, whose existence in this life is so extremely short, and so infinitely precarious, would consider what heaven is, what immortality means, what the title, *sons of God and heirs of God*, implies, what happiness awaits the righteous, be excited to cherish a laudable ambition, to think and live and conduct themselves worthy their high and heavenly birth, and ardently aspire after that glorious patrimony, which God will as assuredly

assuredly one day *bestow* as he hath now *promised* to bestow it. Immortality, reader, is no fable. Immortality is not the fiction of priests to awe and enslave the world. Eternity is no dream, no ideal romantic illusion. God hath promised it: that Being, whose veracity is inviolable, hath appointed us the *heirs* of it. This inheritance, to which we are thus raised, is not indeed in this life. This is not our home. This is not the Christian's portion, or the Christian's rest. We can only in this probationary scene anticipate its joys, and by devout meditations antedate the unutterable vastness and plenitude of its felicity. This inheritance is in reversion. It is beyond the grave. Religion insures it to us. Death will introduce us to it. We must pass through the valley of the shadow of death before the sight of its happy shores salute our enraptured view. This earthly house of our tabernacle must be dissolved before we fully know the *joys which God hath prepared for those who love him.*

Who

Who would not, therefore, that has any regard for his temporal and everlasting interests, embrace a Religious Life, the parent of all this immense profusion of happiness? Who would not, that has any affecting thought of what he *now* is, by the noble privilege of his birth, what he is destined to be by the glorious dispensation of the Gospel covenant, who that has any penetrating influencing sense of the happiness that awaits him, if he persist in the practice of Religion for a little transitory pittance of time, that will be soon swallowed up and lost in the great ocean of eternity, would not, from this moment, relinquish every beloved vice, dissolve every sinful connection, burst from all his wicked associates, avoid every place and every company, that would endanger his virtue, deprave his heart, provoke his God, and obscure his prospects, and, with an heart fired by a virtuous and Christian emulation, press forwards, with eager and impatient steps, to seize the glorious palm of immortality.

R E F L E C -

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REFLECTIONS  
ON THE  
UNACCEPTABLENESS OF A DEATH-BED  
REPENTANCE.

By E. HARWOOD.

Vivere totâ vitâ discendum est : et, quod magis fortasse mira,  
beris, totâ vitâ discendum est mori.

SENECAE Opera, p. 142. Edit. BLAEU.

The THIRD EDITION, with ADDITIONS.

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## P R E F A C E.

THE chief merit of the following little practical essay, is the importance of the subject. The first draught of it was a plain discourse to serve the interests of religion among my own congregation; but being preached to several societies of protestant dissenters in the neighbourhood, they judged the publication of it might be useful, and were importunate with me to consent to it. I therefore intreat every reader, whether he be a learned critic, or an unlearned Christian, that he would be pleased to con-

Consider it, not as the production of the *Head*, but of the *Heart*. I am very sensible that the best discourse on a serious subject, from the most learned and celebrated divine, much less from me, would not be generally attended to in the present state of practical religion. When controversy has *of late* been so warmly agitated in the church, and Christians have been running into parties concerning an *intermediate state*, and concerning the *true character of a man after God's own heart*; and are *now* disputing about the *necessity of water-baptism*, and the *expediency of a liturgy*, and contending for and against these Things, as if salvation depended on the issues of the debate; there is little reason to hope that a plain exhortation to an holy life will gain much of

of their attention. Happy ! if my fate be not like that of the pious and obscure person, mentioned by the ecclesiastical historians ; who, at one of the great *general councils*, when a most numerous convocation of Christian bishops were all bawling and quarrelling about the *Trinity*, begged, again and again, to be heard : this being after long importunity and with great difficulty obtained, he stood up, and, while the whole synod expected to hear something decisive concerning the *Homousios*, in a grave and solemn voice repeated the following passage from St. PAUL : *The grace of God, that bringeth salvation, hath appeared to all men, teaching us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world*—But what was

the consequence—He was *universally hissed*—Nobody knew him, or would own they knew him—They fell immediately to their clamouring concerning the *hypostatical union, eternal generation, everlasting Sonship, necessary emanation*; abusing, calling names, and denouncing damnation one upon another, for not believing in these unintelligible and curious subtleties, just as they themselves believed. May God grant Christians, in our days, a spirit of greater forbearance, candour, moderation and love, one towards another, and the wisdom to consider and treat every thing as but of secondary and subordinate value to real holiness of life! To promote this great design of Christianity shall ever be my sole ambition, and this I am bound to do,

both

both by precept and example, to the utmost of my abilities, as a minister of the gospel.

I cannot conclude, without testifying how greatly I am indebted to the kindness of my friends, and to the candour of the publick, for the favourable reception which they have been pleased to give to my *Account of a Conversion of a Deist*, and to this little practical treatise. I gratefully profess my acknowledgments also to the *Monthly Reviewers*, for their recommending these performances to publick notice, and for the kind hint they lately gave me, in their animadversions on the *first* impression of this pamphlet, concerning the *Theif* on the cross. This singular case, whether it can be urged as an argument in favour of the accept-

H 4 ableness

ableness of a death-bed repentance, I have largely considered in this *second* edition, which I humbly recommend to the reader's candid censure, and serious attention.

R E F L E C -

## REFLECTIONS

ON THE

UNACCEPTABLENESS OF A DEATH-BED

## REPENTANCE.

**T**HREE is hardly any man, how abandoned and depraved soever, but in his sober intervals thinks that he will break off his vicious course some time or other, and spend the evening of his days in sobriety and peace. No sooner is the crime committed, intemperance cloyed, and reflection takes place, but he resolves to free himself from the uneasy shackles of restless desire, craving appetite, and irregular passion; and *some* will

will even date the precise time at which they are determined to reform, and begin a better course of life. Such thoughts and such resolutions naturally rise and force themselves upon the mind, when corrupt appetite is sated, and sensuality slumbers. Nay, even in the midst of these lawless desires themselves, and in the immediate pursuit of forbidden pleasures, how frequently, how painfully does the sinner's heart dictate such silent resolves as these :— “ I will forsake this course, in which I am now embarked—” “ Some time hence I am determined to throw off these habits I have contracted, to controul and subdue these unruly and immoderate desires that now govern me, and after such a time I will be a mirror of temperance and heavenly-mindedness.”

Now nothing more evidently shews us, how infinitely repugnant and fatal vice is to men's truest happiness, than this. Wicked persons themselves being judges, a course of vice

vice is not man's supreme felicity and good. Vice never more effectually condemns itself, than when it makes its votaries ardently long for the ease, freedom, and liberty of a religious life. How is it possible for sinners to expose the fundamental errors and false pleasures of the courses they pursue in a manner more notorious and flagrant, than when they betray an uneasiness in them, thirst after more durable and solid good than what they find in them, and resolve in future life to attain it. I believe very few persons, when they *first* enter into the paths of vice, intend to persevere in them through life. And especially, if a person has been happy in a religious education, such an one commits the *first* heinous crime with the greatest reluctance, and, at the time, is determined he will never, for the future, be prevailed upon to repeat it. But when the bounds of virtue are *once* overleaped, and the restraints of religion broken, then, in-

deed, resolution continues, but the force and power of it are greatly relaxed and weakened. Though the *first* crime was perpetrated with pain and horror, yet they proceed to the *next* with less uneasiness, to a *third* and *fourth* with rapture, and for the future vice bears down reason and conscience with an irresistible torrent. But when awaking from this stupidity, they reflect in what pursuits they are engaged, and where these will end, then they form resolutions of amendment, and think of nothing less than persisting in these courses through the whole of life.

There is such an innate turpitude and horror in vice, that nothing could reconcile men to the love of it, but length of time, long familiarity, and long habit—nay, not *all* these, neither long habit, nor long familiarity, nor length of time can reconcile men to it. All, who are its unhappy captives, sigh for liberty, utter many fruitless wishes, and

form

form many vain resolutions to break the enchantment; but the desires they have inflamed, and the habits they have contracted, make these desires and resolves ineffectual. They are again enticed, again comply, and are again entangled. When sinners have suffered their vices to grow into long and inveterate habits, and have, by repeated indulgencies, silenced the voice of conscience, and dethroned their reason, it is then become the most difficult thing in the world to reform. When Sin has struck its roots into the soul, and, for a number of years, been converting every thing there into its food and nourishment, it is next to impossible ever to be eradicated. Such persons may form specious resolutions of amendment, and determine some time or other to execute them; but when that distant time comes, which they have marked as the happy date of their felicity, it is almost sure to leave them as impenitent as it found them. Of all

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all habits a habit of vice is the most difficult to be overcome. From the moment that any one person begins a bad course, he knows not where his career will stop, to what lengths he may proceed, or *when* and *where* his vices will end. For a course of vice is naturally as progressive as a course of virtue. It moves forward with still greater and greater rapidity and force, and bears down before it all religious considerations, all virtuous impressions, and all resolutions and designs of repentance and amendment. Is it not, therefore, our highest wisdom to fly from such a pernicious evil? Are not our interest, duty, and happiness all concerned in shunning these destructive rocks, that will *shipwreck our souls*, and plunge in ruin our conscience, reason, understanding, and every thing that is dear and valuable to us? All the vigilance we can exert, all the prudence and caution we can exercise, are little enough to prevent us from entering on a course of life which will

will thus defeat our worthiest designs, and frustrate all our virtuous and best-formed resolutions. To do all in my power to deter men from incurring this danger, and forfeiting their virtue and happiness for ever, I design, in the following sections, to expose the inexcuseable folly and wretchedness of delaying amendment of life, and deferring repentance to a late season, or to a death-bed.

### S E C T. I.

WHAT renders such a conduct unjustifiably foolish, and infinitely hazardous is, because it is trifling in affairs of the last importance, on which depend our everlasting happiness or misery. Every one knows, that there can be no salvation without an holy life, and no final happiness without habits and dispositions for it. It is universally certain, that every soul must be excluded from heaven, which is impure and

unholy,

unholy, and that guilt and vice, of *any* kind, utterly disqualify for celestial blessedness. If dispositions and habits of virtue be not cultivated and acquired by us, we are for ever rendered unfit for the presence of God, and the society and friendship of holy angels and blessed spirits ; for every soul, which is unholy and impure, is an object of God's displeasure. This, therefore, is the infinite hazard and danger of deferring amendment of life. For if death surprize such an one *before* he has put his resolutions of repentance and a better life into execution, his condition is miserable beyond redress. And is not such an one in the most dreadful and deplorable danger, who knows that, if he die with all his guilt and sins upon him, he must be irrecoverably lost, yet at the same time can put off the great work of his salvation from month to month, from year to year, just as if he could repent, and reform, and overcome a bad habit, with as much ease as he can

form these vain and frivolous resolutions. The only way of averting God's displeasure is repentance and a good life. And how imprudent, how fatal is it to defer *this* a moment ! The condition of every one, who dies in an impenitent state, is irrevocably fixed and determined for ever. And who sees not the infinite stupidity and madness of resting secure in this danger of mocking God by solemn promises of future amendment, and exposing ourselves to his indignation by instantly repeating those very sins which we intend one day to correct and renounce. Would any wise man allow himself to be negligent and unconcerned, when his everlasting happiness was in danger ? The loss of the soul is irreparable. If *this* be once forfeited by carelessness and irresolution, all our peace, comfort, and enjoyment perish with it for ever. And he, who can speak peace to himself in this danger, and suffer himself to trifle with religion and eternity, is like that imprudent

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dent wretch, who could slumber on a mast in the midst of a tempest, or who could make sport on the edge of a precipice, that was crumbling under his feet.

What inexcusable and desperate folly and danger is it, therefore, thus to fluctuate, when eternal happiness or misery are before us, and resolve and re-resolve, till all the sands of life are run. *To-day* we may repent, reform, and begin a new life, *to-morrow* is all uncertain, and not one moment of it we can call our own \*. Now the mercy of God is attainable, and by *immediately* engaging in the great work of our salvation we may secure it. If we defer securing it, it is evident that we are ignorant of its value, and think it not of that importance, as to forego our present gratifications for the sake of it. But eternal happiness loses not its intrinsic value and moment for our carelessness and negli-

\* Non est, crede mihi, sapientis dicere, Vivam.  
Sera nimis vita est crastina: vive hodie.

MART. lib. i. p. 16.

gence

gence to secure it. Its loss is not to be compensated by all the riches, pleasures, and honours of this vain world. He would be found, at last, to have made but a wretched purchase, *who should have gained the world, and lost his own soul.* Nothing is an equivalent for this. *What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?* And yet, how is this inestimable good basely parted with and ruined for the short-lived insincere pleasures of this life, how wickedly is it depreciated and lost, when men cannot see the necessity of securing it *immediately* by timely repentance and amendment of life! Is it not our duty and interest, then, to comply with the gracious terms of our salvation and happiness, to embrace those benevolent proposals which God freely offers us, and by immediate and genuine repentance and obedience, secure *that* eternal life which God has promised as the reward of our active virtue and sincere endeavours.

## S E C T. II.

**A**NOTHER reason that renders these delays foolish and hazardous, is the shortness and uncertainty of human life. Could we safely depend on time and a long life, and ensure the continuance of our health and vigour, then indeed wicked persons might alledge some plausible pretence for deferring repentance. But if human life be not only short, but precarious and uncertain, and if the present moments are all we have in our own power, then the folly of these delays must appear infinitely wretched and fatal.

The scenes of life are perpetually shifting and varying. Those many myriads, who have acted their several parts, before us, on the stage of life, are all vanished into silent darkness, and we, like them, must soon disappear to make room for others, who, in their turn, shall sink into everlasting forgetfulness.

fulness. *All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass*, for a while it flourishes, and displays a beauteous variety of many lovely and striking colours, but is soon cut down, and the glory of the fashion thereof perishes for ever. Health and vigour of constitution, childhood, youth, and manhood are no security. Death infests the whole of our journey through life, and cuts us off in every stage of it. How is the most firm health impaired and broken by some unexpected disease ! How soon does the most vigorous and robust constitution languish and sink under the assault of some fatal disorder, and the face, that *one day* blessed us with its smiles, the *next day* shocks us with pale and livid ghastliness and horror ! *Childhood and youth are vanity*. How many thousands and millions are there, who, like us, promised themselves long life, long scenes of happiness, long distant joys and gilded prospects of pleasure and every good, who are now in the silent chambers of the grave,

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cut off in the midst of all their fond expectations, surprized in the midst of their plans and projects of happiness, and, what is most worthy our christian commiseration and sorrow, surprized in the midst of their vices, O how unfit for death ! how unprepared for eternity ! Have we not known thousands, who have been the unwilling victims of death in early life, and have been led to its implacable shrine in the bloom of youth and vigour of manhood, who made sure of arriving at old age, and enjoying an uninterrupted flow of health, success, and happiness ? And have we not heard of others, who, when lying on a death-bed, racked with pain, and struggling with a distemper, have uttered many a solemn vow and promise, what sincere penitents they would be, if God would but spare their lives, and allow them space for repentance ! This is a deplorable, but common spectacle. Reader, sooner or later, according as God shall appoint, I, who now

write

write, and thou, who art now perusing these lines, must feel the sting of death, and know what dying is. This by the original irreversible decree of the Almighty we are destined to undergo. But assure thyself, that dreadful as the separation of soul and body is, yet the pain is greatly lessened by a good conscience. What increases and aggravates the horrors and pains of dying *most*, is the consciousness of an ill spent life\*. The dreadfulness of this must be inexpressible. When the pangs of an awakened conscience are added to the paroxysms of a raging disease — this must be a situation, which thou canst better imagine, than I describe. Blessed be God ! it is in our power to make even death easy and comfortable to us. The love of good and goodness will

\* οὐ κατθίζειν γαρ δεινόν, αλλ' αἰσχρώς θανεῖν.

Death is not dreadful : but to quit life's stage  
With shame and conscious guilt, is most tremendous.

EURIP. inter Frag. p. 114. BARNES.

dissipate its horrors, and a blessed immortality before us, the promised reward of our sincere though imperfect virtue, will make us triumph even amidst the painful dissolution of our natures. Death to the good man is but a soft transition into glory. It is only formidable and terrible to the wicked. To him, who has put off repentance till it has seized him, to him only is it full of unutterable woe. If we are but careful and diligent betimes to *choose that good part which shall never be taken away from us*, and by a course of virtuous obedience secure the favour of God, we strip death of above half its terrors, may even exult in the immediate prospect of the grave, and enter the gloomy valley of the shadow of death with christian fortitude. What folly is it then to *double* the pains of dying by a course of impenitence! What a dreadful situation is it, when we have our great work to transact, when our body and our strength are exhausted, and, what ren-

ders

ders it still more dreadful, to hope that we shall be able *then* to transact it ! Can there be a more deplorable circumstance, than not only to be in death, but to have nothing to hope, but every thing to fear, from dying ! If any argument would prevent men from forming excuses and delays in religion, one would think the solemnities of death would. If thou know not the danger of deferring amendment of life, ask the dying, and they will tell thee. *Here* thou mayst see the folly and wretchedness of a sinful course, and where it will end, and the infinite danger thou incurrest by resolving from one week, month, and year to another, to lead a new life, and yet never once seriously putting in practice thy resolutions. It is useful instruction, which the *wise man* gives us : *Boast not thyself of to-morrow, for thou knowest not what a day may produce.* All beyond the present point is absolute uncertainty. It discovers the greatest ignorance of ourselves to depend

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depend upon a long life. Not one in ten thousand arrives at old age. Myriads are swept down by the flood of time, long before they have attained any advanced period of life, whose hopes and prospects were as fair and flattering as ours. And amidst such uncertainty, is it not wretched presumption and folly to defer the great concerns of religion to a period which we shall, most probably, never see\*! Can we think of the dangers and diseases that infest our natures, and plan such vain and visionary schemes? If our knowledge of futurity extend not to a day,

\* This general and most unhappy conduct of mankind is pathetically lamented and justly exposed by SENECA:  
" Audies plerosque dicentes : A quinquagesimo in otium  
" secedam : sexagesimus annus ab officiis me dimittet. Et  
" queni tandem longioris vitae prædem accipis ; quis ista,  
" sicuti disponis, ire patietur ? Non pudet te reliquias vitae  
" tibi reservare, & id solum tempus bonæ menti destinare,  
" quod in nullam rem conferri possit ? Quam ferum est,  
" tunc vivere incipere, cum definendum est ? Quæ tam  
" stulta mortalitatis oblivio, in quinquagesimum & sexage-  
" sumum annum differre sana consilia ; et inde vitam velle  
" inchoare, quo pauci perduxerunt ?"

SENECAE OPERA, p. 140. ED. BLAUE.

or to the next moment, can we justify these delays either to our reason or our consciences ? Can it be reasonable to defer a thing which we own ought to be done, but which we do not see the necessity of performing immediately ? Can it be reasonable thus to defer it, when we may never have another opportunity of putting it into execution ?

Besides, we know not in what manner, or in what circumstances, we may make our exit from this life. We know not but our indispositions and pains may be such as shall disqualify us for settling our affairs for this life. And if they incapacitate us for adjusting the petty interests and contemptible affairs of this vain world, *how much more shall we be unfit* for transacting our everlasting concerns with the great God !—Even supposing we could, in this extremity, transact the great concerns of our souls to any saving purposes. But alas ! this is much to be questioned. It is to the last degree unsafe and dangerous to

trust

trust to it—did I say it was *unsafe* and *dangerous*?—I should rather have said, it was a most fatal and pernicious mistake, that has proved, and will prove, the ruin of thousands. While, therefore, God *waits over us to be gracious*, and allows us space and means of *repentance*, let us procrastinate no longer: let us put it out of the power of time to hurt our everlasting interests, and with active industry and diligence *work out our own salvation with fear and trembling*, laying up that fund of good hopes with respect to futurity, that may smooth our passage through this life, and most of all that passage which leads from death into *eternity*.

## S E C T. III.

**T**HE impediments of an holy life will hereafter, by delay, prove stronger greater than they are now. This is evident. The habits of vice will be so strengthened and established

established by time, as to render the difficulty of eradicating them vastly greater. Time, which insensibly impairs and conquers other things, gradually fixes and confirms vicious habits. By trusting, therefore, to an uncertain hereafter, in which to reform, and lead a new life, you only render the difficulties of repentance greater, and your aversion to overcome them stronger. Nay, by length of time, you are sure to infix these habits so strongly and indelibly in the soul, as to render the impediments of an holy life morally insuperable. The tree, newly planted, is easily plucked up ; but if it has had time to strike root, to tear it up is impossible. Vice, at first, is easily expelled the mind ; but if it be suffered to grow into long and inveterate habits, it is almost unsurmountable. This shews us the wisdom of opposing the first beginnings of a vicious course, and of timely checking and preventing the growth of those depraved desires, which, if indulged and che-

rished, would soon baffle all our endeavours to repel and overcome them. The heart, where vice predominates, contracts, in time, a callous insensibility, which nothing can affect and penetrate. So that all those arguments and motives to repentance, which once appeared so rational and striking, do, by delay, lose all their force and efficacy. The depraved heart is not in the condition and state it was formerly. Once the threatenings of God filled it with terror, and the prospect of a solemn judgment made it, for a time, lose all relish for the excesses of pleasure. But, in time, these denunciations of the Almighty cease to impress it, and it either determines to disregard them, or, which is just the *same* thing, fixes on some distant time in which it *intends* to regard them. This is the pernicious folly and wretchedness of delays in matters of religion. Such resolutions, for a time, soothe and please the mind, but are sure to delude and amuse it, till

they

they have extirpated tenderness of conscience, the force and power of religion and virtue, and sunk it in everlasting destruction.

So that repentance, at any one distant time, is more unlikely than at present. Neither are you sure that you shall have such calls to repentance, as you *now* have, even supposing your continuance in life. You may, in some future season of life, be seduced by your sinful companions into a disregard of reading the holy scriptures, of frequenting publick ordinances, and so voluntarily deprive yourself of those means of repentance and calls to an holy life, which you now enjoy. You may be brought by your sins to see no necessity in attending upon these publick duties, which are the ordinary methods of God's providence to reform and reclaim sinners, and so, at once, shut yourself up in woful and final impenitency. The extravagancies of a vicious heart and conduct may, at last, induce you to believe the Christian religion to be a fable,

a fable, its Author to be an impostor, and his followers a number of deluded enthusiasts. However this may shock you at present, yet it is possible. For what degree of shame and infamy is not possible to one, who has surrendered up himself to follow the lead of every wandering desire and irregular affection?—I make no doubt, but the very first excuses and delays you made filled you with a great deal of remorse and uneasiness.—But soon by delaying you will contract an habit of delaying, and the forming these resolutions, from time to time, will become as familiar to you as one of the common and ordinary offices of life. For vice soon grows familiar to its lover, soon loses, in his eye, its native deformity, and recommends itself to him, by every blandishment, as his chief good, throwing an impenetrable mist before his reason and understanding, and preventing him from seeing his best interests in that striking

striking point of light in which he once saw them

But, perhaps, you will say, “ Some time hereafter I shall be better disposed to mind religion, and to improve my advantages. To mind religion *now* would only expose me to the jests and contempt of my companions. It would be inverting the order of nature, and assuming, in the gaiety of youth, a temper and disposition only proper for old age. It is now too soon to entertain so gloomy a companion.”—But is it ever too soon to be virtuous and happy? —Nor have you any reason to suppose, that some time hence you will be better disposed to improve your advantages than at present. But quite the contrary. For you will not have, at any other future time, that affecting sense of your condition, as you now have. Nor will you have that conviction of the necessity of an holy life, that persuasion of the worth of the soul, that warm perception of

the value and importance of the divine favour, that now possesses you. For time and a course of impenitence and guilt will soon erase from your heart all those tender impressions of which you are now susceptible, and make you enter upon a religious life with a great deal more reluctance and aversion than you now would.

Besides, consider that deferring this great work of repentance and a new life to old age is extremely foolish and dangerous, as it is impossible for you to know whether your mind will be in a fit state and condition to execute your pre-concerted measures. You cannot but know, that this is a season of life, when the infirmities of declining nature greatly impair the faculties of the mind, and lay the understanding, reason, and mental powers in sad and deplorable ruins. The last close of our days has enough to do to struggle with pain and weakness, and is rendered both unfit for and unequal to that course

course of vigilance and mortification which penitence requires. When the shades of a long, long night are drawing over us, and all the powers of the mind are decayed and weakened, can we be said, at *such* a time, to be in a proper frame and disposition for making *our calling and election sure*? So that he who seriously considers, how frequently reason deserts us before the end of life, must see the necessity of engaging in religion, in the vigour of life and understanding. Old age leaves us not abilities for discharging the common duties and offices of life, much less for conflicting with long established habits, and long continued sins, and for executing the great and important work of our salvation. This consideration is urged with great strength and reason, as an incentive to immediate activity and diligence, by the excellent and devout *Antoninus*\*. “ One ought not only

\* Vid. MARC. ANTONIN. lib. iii. p. 60, ED. ULTRAJ. 1698. fol.

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“ to consider,” says this virtuous emperor,  
“ that each day a part of his life is spent,  
“ and the remainder grown less, but that it  
“ is very uncertain, though he should live  
“ longer, whether his reason and mental  
“ faculties will continue equally sufficient  
“ for the duties of life, and for those re-  
“ searches which conduce to the knowledge  
“ of divine and human things. For if age  
“ or a distemper should impair and injure  
“ the faculties of his mind, perhaps, indeed,  
“ he may continue to breathe, to receive  
“ nourishment, to indulge imagination, and  
“ exert the lower appetites; but he will be  
“ dead to all the valuable purposes of life.  
“ The power of self-government, of exe-  
“ cuting well the various offices of virtue,  
“ of accurately distinguishing all appearances  
“ which strike the passions, and all other  
“ employments which require a well-exer-  
“ cised and vigorous understanding, are in-  
“ tirely lost to him. We should therefore,

“ says

“ says he, make haste, not only because death  
“ is every day much nearer, but because the  
“ power of considering well and understand-  
“ ing things often leaves us before we die.”

But you will farther vindicate your delays and plead in defence of them, “ That you  
“ will have, in subsequent life, fewer tempt-  
“ ations, and that you hope to outlive those  
“ that now surround you.”—A most egre-  
gious and fatal mistake, arising from a deplo-  
rable ignorance of the world, and of human  
nature ! Does not a new fett of temptation<sup>s</sup>  
regularly succeed each other, in as constant  
and invariable a manner as one stage of life  
succeeds another ? When youthful pleasure  
loses its charms, does not, *immediately*, for-  
did interest, the lust of wealth and grandeur,  
seize and captivate the mind ? Passions, as  
repugnant to religion and virtue, as any that  
infest the early periods of life. The whole  
of our passage through this state of trial is  
surrounded with snares. There is no age or

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situation exempt from temptations of one kind or another. *That* is the happiest situation, which has the fewest. So that to outlive temptations, is impossible. They remove and change with each revolving year. And if I might be permitted to offer my sentiments, I cannot but persuade myself, that declining life is infested with temptations, *more* disfavourable to the interests of religion, than any of the early periods. Avarice, which is the particular and characteristic vice of old age, is deafier to the calls of repentance than youthful pleasure. Self-importance and self-conceit, the common errors of old age, are less susceptible of impressions in favour of religion, than an heart immersed in the excesses of giddy pleasure and gay amusement. Not to mention, that long continued habits of sin, and almost the whole of life spent in a contemptuous disregard of God and religion, and in a course of profligate and abominable pursuits, create an infinitely greater aversion

aversion to repentance, than it is possible for a youthful mind ever to admit. Not but that *every* part of life, that is spent in sin, is extremely dangerous: but most of all, I humbly conceive, the last stage, when it defeats the intentions of God, gives the reins to avarice and worldly-mindedness, and by these sordid, earth-born, insatiable passions renders the soul almost incapable of being impressed by arguments of a moral and religious nature.

This should shew us the folly of that vain hope we are so ready to cherish, that we shall, some time hereafter, be better disposed for entering upon a religious life. It is a common delusion, and as fatal as it is common. Sin gains strength by delays; and the force of temptations, for want of being vigorously counteracted at first, in time becomes next to invincible. Our impediments to an holy life will never be fewer than they are at present. The conquest over ourselves will ne-

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ver be so easily gained as at present ; if we  
can but determine to attack our irregular  
passions and appetites with deliberate resolu-  
tion. They are extremely useful exhorta-  
tions, which the Scripture gives us on this  
head. *Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do  
it with thy might ; for there is no work, nor  
device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave  
whither thou goest.* And the apostle speaks  
of an *accepted time*, that is, a season of life,  
the most proper for performing this great and  
important work, and acquaints us that *this*  
was solely the *present*. Behold ! *now is the  
accepted time ! Behold ! now is the day of  
salvation.* Determine then to comply with  
an invitation so friendly and so reasonable.  
Defer not to an uncertain Hereafter the pro-  
per duties and offices of the present day. In-  
voke the assistance of the Almighty to streng-  
then and confirm you in these resolutions. De-  
vote the residue of your life to God, and put  
it out of the power of a sudden and untimely  
death

death to injure your everlasting welfare. Prostrate yourself, in deep and sincere penitence, before the throne of God, and acknowledge the errors of your ways with unfeigned contrition and remorse. Embrace those gracious conditions which God of his infinite compassion freely offers you ; *fly for refuge* to that benevolent Being who is merciful to all true penitents, and labour to avert his displeasure from you by acts of fervent piety and obedience. The only method this, to render God propitious to you, and to make him befriend you both in life and in death.

S E C T. IV.

**A**NOTHER consideration, that shews us the folly and danger of deferring repentance and a good life, is, that *late* repentance is both extremely bitter and distressing, and very seldom sincere. That it must be accompanied with many dreadful and unhappy

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happy circumstances, is evident. For you will have to review a long series of guilt attended with many aggravations. All the past sins of your youth will crowd into your remembrance. You will have to review the beginning and progress of your vices, the *times* and *places* in which you committed them, how *often* they were repeated, and with *what circumstances* of shame and guilt. All these will rush into your mind, and render you extremely wretched. The reflection will fill you with the most painful self-accusation, that you had been blessed with pious and religious parents, who gave you good instructions, set before you a fair example of all virtue and goodness, were careful to train you up in the knowledge and practice of religion, and who, with many tears and sorrows, prayed for your future sobriety and happiness, and that these admonitions you have slighted. It will fill you with bitter grief and trouble to reflect, that though your

mind

mind has frequently been impressed with a striking sense of your profligacy and guilt, yet that you have returned to your darling vices, even while these impressions have been warm upon your mind, and, with these strong convictions, have repeated the most shameful and scandalous immoralities. It will also pain you to recollect many instances of ingratitude to the blessed God, who has been supplying your wants at the time you were profaning his name and worship, and violating his most holy laws. You cannot think of his infinite goodness to you, in the whole of your passage through life, in giving you religious parents, good instructors, happy circumstances, health, ease, success, and numberless other blessings, without feeling the most acute sorrow and self-abhorrence for your wilful impenitency and contemptuous abuse of his mercies. When you reflect also on the blessings that your Redeemer has bestowed upon you, the greatness of his condescension,

descension, the excellency of his religion, the many powerful arguments and animating promises to true repentance and sincere obedience, it will fill you with inward compunction, that you should so long have rejected all these gracious invitations to an holy life, should for so many years have been destroying your everlasting interests, and frustrating all the benevolent designs of God and Christ for your salvation.— *Another* consideration, that will, in a late repentance, affect your mind with inexpressible grief and distress, will be, that you have during the whole course of your past wickedness sinned against the convictions of your reason and conscience. These kind monitors, in soft and faithful whispers, often warned you of the wrath of God, of the solemnities of a future judgment, and the awful recompences of a tremendous eternity. But these admonitions you silenced, and rescued yourself from their disagreeable importunity, by flying to scenes

of riot, clamour, and dissipation, thus effectually defeating that kind method which God was pleased to make use of for your amendment and reformation. Your conscience told you, how contrary the course you were pursuing was to your welfare and happiness, and *where* it would end. And that you have so long resisted all these strong convictions, will afford a subject of inexpressible woe and confusion to you.—But what, in a late repentance, will rack and torture your mind with the greatest anguish and distress will be, that by your sins and example you have been the means of misleading others, and plunging them into everlasting ruin. This will be a consideration full of horror indeed, that you have not only been *near* destroying your own happiness, but also have, perhaps, *actually* destroyed that of many others. For it will be impossible for you to determine how widely the pernicious infection of your example may diffuse itself, and how

many

many unhappy creatures it may seize and destroy \*.

But not only is late repentance attended with the distressing circumstances which I have mentioned, but it is seldom sincere. One may venture to assert this without incurring the charge of uncharitableness. For nothing is more common than for those, whom pain has forced to utter the most bitter lamentations, and to send up to heaven the most pathetic cries and protestations, to return, after a recovery, to those very sins they have just been deplored. Sinners often times discover not the folly and wretchedness of vice, till pain convince them of it. Reflection slumbers, till the excruciating anguish of some acute and violent distemper awaken it. And yet no sooner is the mind,

\* “ Non enim ibi consistunt exempla, unde cœperunt ;  
“ sed, quamlibet in tenuem recepta tramitem, latissime  
“ evagandi sibi viam faciunt : et, ubi semel recto deerra-  
“ tum est, in præceps pervenitur.”

VELL. PAT. Hist. Rom. lib. ii, cap. 3.

by this severe antidote, restored to some faint sensations of virtue and happiness, but as soon as pain ceases, sobriety ceases with it, and from the time that health and vigour are regained, they feel the same fondness for their former irregular courses, and again become the willing slaves of lawless desire and forbidden pleasure. A violent disease may for a while extinguish the love of sin, and compel men to abhor and detest themselves for it: but sickness, though it wither and blast the glory of this fair but noxious flower, yet cannot eradicate and destroy the seeds of it. The sunshine of prosperity and health fosters and invigorates them, and causes them to reflourish in all their primitive banefulness and power.

Who utters more piercing cries and groans than the condemned malefactor? How does he abhor himself for those crimes which have brought him to such an infamous and untimely end! In what agonies of sorrow

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and remorse does he implore his judge to acquit him ! What vows and solemn protestations does he utter of future amendment, and in what fervent prayers and bitterness of soul does he supplicate the Almighty to forgive and pardon him !—Yet no sooner is he reprieved and acquitted, but all these impressions are effaced, he forgets immediately the agony and distress of mind he was in, and the many vows he made, returns to his former courses with renewed ardour and relish, and again perpetrates and glories in those very crimes, for which he so narrowly escaped a most shameful condemnation.

There is a great difference betwixt that repentance which is extorted by pain, and that which flows from choice and reason. The *former* is transient and momentary, and ceases with its cause. The *latter* is as lasting and genuine as the principles from which it proceeds. The *former* may fitly be compared to the morning cloud or the early dew that

soon

soon passes away : the *latter* to that pure and permanent light which shines with greater and greater brightness till the perfect day.

It would be happy, if sickness freed the soul of its irregular passions and destructive habits, as it clears the body of all its noxious humours. But these, if once contracted and strengthened by time, may, indeed, lose their spring and power, and, seemingly, be extirpated by acute and lasting pain ; but soon they return with redoubled energy, and baffle all the means to overcome them, but those of calm reason, deliberate resolution, and determined choice.

So that, according to the principles of reason and the nature of the human mind, that late repentance, which is forced by pain and sickness, can seldom or never be sincere. For repentance is an act and disposition of the mind, and flows not either from the good or bad temperament and state of the body. The violence of a surfeit, fever, gout, or any

other painful distemper, may produce, for a time, a strong sense of guilt, an awakened conscience, most cutting remorse, and painful self-accusation. But then painful self-accusation, cutting remorse, an awakened conscience, and a strong sense of guilt, are not repentance. True repentance evidences its sincerity by a course of virtuous and pious actions. Whereas that repentance, if it may be called repentance, that is merely forced upon the mind by the fear and danger of dying, cannot be sincere—for this reason—because it is sure to grow weaker and weaker in proportion as health and strength become stronger and stronger. They, therefore, who foolishly depend upon the sincerity and acceptableness of a late repentance, certainly confide in that which is not in their power, in that which not only death may hinder them from ever putting in execution, but their confirmed sins and season of life ever prevent from executing to any genuine and saving purposes.

S E C T. V.

THE result of the reasons and arguments above-mentioned concludes strongly against the acceptableness of a death-bed repentance. Nothing can equal the delusion and wretchedness of men's trusting to this. Yet how common is it for the most profligate and abandoned creatures to cherish this vain hope, and to indulge this pleasing but fatal imagination. Persons, whose whole lives are a contradiction to the rules of reason and Christianity, who deny themselves no gratification, however shameful and detestable, and give the free reins to every sensual desire and appetite, hope they can, at last, make sufficient atonement to the Almighty by asking his forgiveness, and expressing their sorrow for what they have done. Just as if a few prayers and tears in the agonies of death could blot out the whole guilt of a mis-spent life!

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The condition of every death-bed penitent appears to me desperate. There is nothing in reason or revelation, that either justifies it, or in the least intimates its acceptableness.

But the very contrary. It appears to *reason* infinitely absurd to put off the great and important concern of life till a fit of sickness seize us, with hopes of being *then only* properly qualified to execute it. And it appears absolutely irrational to think and hope that, when we have mis-spent the whole of life, we shall be considered as having sufficiently improved it, *when* we testify our sorrow for having *not* improved it. And with regard to *revelation*, it gives not to these the glimmer of an hope that they shall be accepted. But all its precepts, exhortations, examples, and promises are inconsistent with such an hope. To him, who wilfully shuts his eyes against its clear discoveries, who cannot be prevailed upon to embrace religion and virtue by the arguments and motives it furnishes, to him,

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it is so far from giving any hopes, whatever his remorse upon a death-bed may be, that it leaves him nothing but a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation. And certainly the condition of that man, who, all his life, has been favoured with such divine and heavenly light, who has had so many opportunities of repentance and calls to amendment of life, who has so often been warned of the destruction into which his vices would at last assuredly plunge him, and who has had so many strong convictions of conscience, so many invitations to sobriety and virtue, and so many means of securing his final happiness, and yet resisted and defeated them all ; certainly the condition of such an one must be pronounced absolutely desperate and hopeless. Such are excluded from all prospect of future happiness both by the laws of reason and revelation. For grief and sorrow for sin is not repentance. That is repentance, and that only, which manifests its sin-

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cerity and genuineness by a virtuous life. Repentance is that good disposition of mind, that is studious to repair its former irregularities by acts of piety and goodness, and that proves its reality both to God and man by the severities of an holy life. But from *this* the dying penitent is debarred—and consequently— forfeits that character of a penitent, which the gospel so expressly represents and defines.

Besides, the gospel every-where lays the greatest stress upon an holy life, and declares, in the most absolute terms, that there is no salvation ~~with~~ it. It exhorts us to the early practice of all virtue, and to give all diligence to work out our salvation, and to make our calling and election sure. What hopes of salvation, therefore, can they cherish, if the gospel is to be the standard of our principles, who are so far from engaging in the great work of their salvation, that they abuse human life to the most unworthy and despicable

cable pursuits, and never once think of reformation, repentance, religion, or heaven, till the pangs of death awaken their reflections, and present them with a faithful picture of their iniquity and wretchedness ! Have such any reason to hope for the rewards of holiness, who have never qualified themselves for them ? Or is it fit and just in God Almighty to connive at and overlook all the heinous and enormous vices of an whole life, merely for a few inactive wishes and prayers at the end of it ?— With as much reason might a day-labourer expect and demand the wages of an *whole* day, who had trifled it away in idleness and sloth, and only worked *an hour* in the *evening*.

Farther, it may be questioned, in ten thousand instances, whether a death-bed repentance be sincere. Perhaps those, who in their last extremities implore God so earnestly for pardon, have, in some *former* fits of pain and sickness, made the same vows and prayers,

and broke them all upon a recovery. And this, it may be, not only in one but many instances. What greater security and proof, then, are their *present* protestations and lamentations, that if God should restore them to health and ease, they would not, in the same manner, and with the same fondness, as *formerly*, return to their beloved vices? It amounts to the highest possible probability, if not certainty, that they would. For their habits are the same, their minds were in the same disposition *before* death seized them, as *formerly*, their aversion to God and goodness the same *then*, as before any *former* indisposition, and their appetites and passions the same—nay, rendered by Time a great deal more violent and ungovernable. So that the reason of things, the moral constitution of the mind, and the progressive nature of vice, all these are against the sincerity of a death-bed repentance, and against the probability that it ever should be so.

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We cannot be ignorant how many thousands of libertines and profligates there have been, who, when attacked by a sudden calamity, or a dangerous disease, have made many a solemn promise, what mirrors of heavenly-mindedness they would prove, if God would but deliver them, and grant them time for repentance—God has delivered them—But have they become the penitent and good persons they promised they would be?—Nothing less true.—The danger over; they have been ashamed of their penitence, have reproached themselves with fear and cowardice, and even ridiculed themselves for their meanness and melancholy. And doubtless there is not *one* in ten thousand, who upon a death-bed deplores his mis-spent life, and begs of God pardon and time for repentance, but if recovered, would act in the same manner.

Far be it from me to speak dishonourably of God, or charge him with want of clemency and mercy. I flatter myself, no one

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in the whole universe of rational beings, can entertain more generous and enlarged thoughts of the divine benevolence, and the extent of it, than myself. And I can truly assert, that there is nothing that ever excites in me greater horror, detestation, and contempt, than those rigid, gloomy, and illiberal principles, by what Numbers soever embraced, and by what venerable names soever espoused, that would confine the divine goodness to an inconsiderable number, and to an inconsiderable party, and exalt his other perfections at the expence of it. But, at the same time, I must freely declare to my reader, that the mercy and goodness of God are not lavished indiscriminately, but are solely confined to sincere penitents and holy persons. There are ends of government to be subserved, which require the exertion of this attribute in a proper and just limitation, and in such an exact measure, as neither justice nor wisdom may be violated by it. For how could either

either the wisdom or justice of God be conserved, or the great ends of his moral administration be answered, if the rewards of piety and virtue were bestowed with an undistinguishing hand, and the penitent *of an hour*, whom the fear of death had made such, were equally intitled to the divine love and regards, as he, who had spent the *whole of life* in an uniform and steady virtue—It is impossible—God cannot be thus *unjust*. He cannot, in consistency with the great principles of his equity and wisdom, approve of those, whose lives have been one continued satire and insult upon his laws, and for a few broken petitions, extorted merely by pain, break at once all the rules of unerring rectitude, expunge all their crimes, and make them the heirs of an happy immortality, equally with those whose whole lives have been an ornament to religion. Nothing can be more improbable: nothing more impossible. We see this is not done in any civil society

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society and government upon earth. Will the law release a murderer, because he is racked with convictions of his guilt, and promises never to commit murder again? Will a just judge be prevailed upon by the importunity and prayers of a robber or an assassin, to acquit him? The laws of human society would cease to awe and restrain mankind, were their sanctions and punishments to be remitted and annulled, when any offender testified his remorse, and strove to move compassion. And if the laws of a well-ordered society, that condemn the criminal to death, are never dispensed with and repealed for any protestations of future amendment, if every equitable and impartial judge pronounces the sentence of condemnation, whaever vows and sorrows may be expressed to avert it; will the divine laws of the supreme Ruler of the universe accept of visionary resolutions, accept of a mere frivolous intention for the performance, or will the

great

great judge of all flesh consider that as done, which has not been done, be prevailed upon by noisy importunity, or the loud accents of grief and remorse, to break the established laws of his government, and, after an whole mis-spent life, to approve them as true penitents and good Christians, merely for a few momentary compunctions?—So that in every view we are presented with the folly and wretchedness, the vanity and unavailability of a death-bed repentance.

In fine, Them, who, during an whole life, have never once thought of repentance, till the shafts of death have pierced them, neither God himself, nor angels, nor heaven, can make happy. For if they have not habitually loved God and goodness *here*, how can they do it *hereafter*? If they have contracted no relish for the entertainments of religion, and the pleasures of virtue here upon earth, will they acquire a taste and love for them, somehow or other, in a future state? The

sinful,

sinful, impure, and polluted soul defies even the omnipotence of God himself to make it happy. As soon might darkness be converted into light, and the most opposite things in nature into their contraries, as the soul of the intemperate and abandoned sinner be brought to love God as its chief good, and the pleasures of heaven as its supreme and sole felicity. So that to assert, that God himself *could not* make an unholy soul happy, is no more than asserting, that God cannot work a contradiction, confound the nature of virtue and vice, or make unholiness and heaven, misery and happiness, mutually agree and harmonize.

Nor could the blessed society of angels, or all the joys of heaven, make such a soul happy that had previously acquired no taste and disposition for such happiness. For the beginning of our heaven is formed *here*. Heaven is only the present state carried on, and advanced to farther and higher perfection.

If a love for God and virtue be not contracted *here*, if habits of holiness and qualifications for this happiness be not procured *here*, heaven itself could not make us happy. For if our tempers and dispositions be not suited to those of the heavenly inhabitants, if our taste be in all respects dissimilar to theirs, and the objects of our pleasures the reverse of theirs ; how could we be happy in their converse and friendship, how could we be happy in the society of those, whose desires and aversions were so repugnant to and so irreconcileable with our own ? Nay, could we suppose an unholy person introduced into those blessed abodes, it would be impossible for him to enjoy the pure and elegant pleasures of them ; for his soul is not congenial with the place, nor the sensibilities of his mind attuned to the sacred and virtuous employment of its inhabitants. Place a wicked abandoned wretch in the company of holy and virtuous persons, let him hear them discourse of the pleasures  
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of a religious life, and you make him, for the time, perfectly miserable, his inward uneasiness appears in all he says or does, and he, all the while, wishes to regain his liberty, and rejoin the old associates of his beloved vices. Now the very same aversion to holy things would he transfer to heaven, supposing him admitted there. O fatal mistake, to think that a future state will change the present temper of our minds, and that we shall, upon our *first* admission there, have dispositions and habits perfectly unlike to those that govern us *here*. We shall certainly carry with us the same dispositions, affections, tempers and desires, we contracted in this world, and be happy or miserable, in consequence of them. Nothing shews us the impossibility of God's acceptance of a death-bed repentance more strongly than this. Habits of holiness attained in this life are indispensably necessary to qualify and fit us for the divine joys and sacred pleasures of heaven.

It is impossible the late penitent can have acquired these habits. The laws, therefore, of God and heaven exclude him.

S E C T. VI.

WICKED persons will urge in defence of their conduct any arguments, how weak, ridiculous, and absurd soever, that will but palliate their vices, and excuse them from the severities of an holy life. Nothing more natural, nothing more common, than for men, who have been long enslaved to forbidden pleasure, and have wasted a great part of life in sensual indulgences, to exert all the powers of fancy, wit and genius in representing the innocence of their pursuits. They cannot think of abandoning their beloved pleasures ; human life would be a scene of gloom and wretchedness without them ; they are determined, therefore, to assert the supreme felicity, free-

dom and dignity of a vicious life, and very seriously sit down to collect the best arguments, and to study the most artful apologies, for the courses in which they are resolved to persist. Accordingly, you will often hear such gravely maintaining the lawfulness of gratifying all our appetites with their desired objects, pitying the melancholy of their religious parents, relations and friends, and valuing themselves on *their* superior knowledge, in having, at last, found the road that leads to true happiness: but, what is most astonishing, you will often hear those quoting the scriptures in vindication of themselves, whose lives are a notorious satire and insult upon them. The eyes of wicked persons are fixed upon the scripture characters and examples, with a penetration that no defect or folly, how slight and venial soever, can elude or escape: these they will stoop for and pick up with transport inexpressible, while all *their* virtues and excellencies, tho' ever so eminent

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and distinguished, are consigned either to forgetfulness or contempt.

Who would imagine, that when the scriptures abound with so many importunate exhortations to an holy life, when every page is replete with the most warm and animated incitements to religion and virtue, when it so plainly teaches men the indispensable necessity of holiness, when it exhibits before our eyes so many divine forms of living virtue, in all their attractions, most powerfully to excite our imitation, and when it so faithfully and pathetically dissuades men, by the most awful threatenings, from delaying repentance and reformation of life; who, that seriously considers the whole tenour and tendency of the scriptures, would imagine that the instance of the *thief upon the cross* should ever be alledged in justification of deferring amendment, and be produced as a standing proof to christians, in all ages of the church, of the acceptableness of a death-bed repentance! what

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absurdity can be greater, than from an *instance* that happened but *once*, and can never happen *again*, to draw a conclusion, which God never designed should be drawn from it; a conclusion that cuts the sinews of all religion, subverts all our obligations to virtue and obedience, and destroys the very end and design of the gospel. To suppose that God Almighty intended *this instance* as an encouragement to notorious and abandoned sinners to expect pardon and forgiveness in the agonies of death, is to suppose that the deity is a capricious and arbitrary being, acting from no steady and fixed principles in the moral government of his creatures, enjoining, indeed, upon his accountable subjects, by the strongest arguments and most tremendous menaces, the absolute necessity of a virtuous life, yet notwithstanding suffering those at last, who have all their lives violated the obligations of duty, to escape with impunity, and obtain eternal happiness, provided they are so fortunate, as,

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at the close of a whole mispent life, to have time or breath enough to pronounce *three* faint, ineffectual wishes, or *three* vain and visionary resolutions.

The gospel every where lays the greatest stress upon an holy life ; assures us, in the plainest manner, that *nothing* will intitle us to the divine favour but *this*, and that all *other* dependencies are as vain as they are wicked. I am at a loss, therefore, to say, whether it discovers greater weakness or wickedness, for any one, who calls himself a Christian, wilfully to disregard all the precepts and exhortations of the gospel, and to affect a sovereign contempt of all those importunate persuasions, of all those solemn admonitions, of all those pathetic and repeated invitations to a life of holiness which the gospel urges, and to fix on this *sole* instance, to make it the anchor of his hopes, putting off repentance and a good life from one year to another,

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thinking it time enough in the hour of death to pray and repent, and to be forgiven and accepted, as the *thief on the cross* was. For how different are the *circumstances* of this crucified malefactor, and the *circumstances* of common christians ! he had *no other* opportunity, but *this*, of testifying his faith in christ. This was the *first* that offered, and he *immediately* embraced and improved it. But obstinate, impenitent sinners have nothing of this nature to alledge in vindication of delaying repentance to the end of life. They have repeated warning of their danger, are favoured with frequent opportunities of hearing the instructions of the Gospel; the Scriptures are in their hands, and they may, whenever they are disposed, acquire a good knowledge of the truth, reasonableness and excellency of the Christian religion : so that the *example* of the *thief on the cross*, who *readily* improved the *first* opportunity, that was given him, of professing himself a disciple of Christ, is so

far from justifying sinners in deferring repentance to a death-bed, that, in the most glaring light, it shows such a conduct to be inex-  
sitably criminal and enormously wicked.

But in order that I may most effectually invalidate the argument brought from this instance in favour of the acceptableness of a death-bed repentance, and that I may expose the vanity and absurdity of such a wretched dependence, I shall present the reader with the sentiments of some of the most learned and eminent divines the Christian world hath produced, concerning this *extraordinary case* of the *thief* upon the cross, which hath filled so many good men with inquietude, and so many bad men with confidence.

Grotius: "It is plain, says he, that this thief knew a great deal of the history of Christ: part of which, it is probable, he learned before he was apprehended, and part in prison. And to the common objection, that this malefactor gave no substantial moral

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proofs of his being a penitent, this most judicious commentator replies, that he gave *several* illustrious evidences of the genuineness and sincerity of his repentance. For he *acquiesced* in his punishment, from a consciousness that it was deserved. He also reproved his fellow-sufferer for his opprobrious language, and vindicated oppressed innocence. These were *fruits* becoming repentance."

GROTI Opera, vol. ii. p. 460. Ed. Lond.  
1679. fol.

Dr. Whitby: " Almost all the interpreters, says he, that I have read, say here, that this thief began his repentance upon the cross ; and hence others are apt to conceive, that tho' they repent only at the last gasp, they may enter into paradise as he did. But this is but a precarious supposition at the best, and like to prove a broken reed to the christian that depends upon it. For it is *not* certain that this thief *only then* began to act the penitent: he might have begun that work in prison

prison long before, and so the whole foundation of their hopes, who depend upon this instance, is built upon a great uncertainty.—Observe, adds he, that this thief improved his time at last in that extraordinary manner, as perhaps no man ever did before, or will hereafter. He then believed Christ to be the Saviour of the world, when one of his disciples had betrayed, another had denied him, and all of them had forsook him; to be the Son of God, the Lord of life, when he was hanging on the cross, suffering the pangs of death, and seemingly deserted by his Father. He proclaims him the Lord of paradise, when all the Jews condemned him, and the gentiles crucified him as an impostor, and a malefactor. He feared God, acknowledged the justice of his punishment, and did with patience submit to it. He condemned himself, and justified the holy Jesuſ, declaring that he had *done nothing* amiss. He was ſollicitous, not for the preservation of his body, but the

ſalvation

salvation of his soul, not only for his own, but the salvation of his brother thief, whom he so charitably reprehends, so earnestly requesteth not to proceed in his blasphemous language, and so lovingly inviteth to the fear of God. So that the glory which he did to Christ by his faith and piety, seems such, as the whole series of a pious life in other men can hardly parallel."

WHITBY's Paraphrase on Luke xxiii. ver. 40.

WHISTON: "I absolutely deny that he was an *impenitent* sinner, or, that he had given no instance of his conversion and holy disposition of soul, before this approach of death. On the contrary, I affirm, that there is nothing in the history of the crucifixion of our Saviour and of the thieves with him, that implies the wicked and impenitent state of this thief till the time of his execution; but allows us to suppose, that altho' he once had been a very wicked malefactor, yet for some (perhaps a long) time before this, he had changed

changed his course, and was become a very penitent and a very religious person. I observe, adds he, that to call a robber, who was justly condemned, and was now to be executed for his robbery, *a thief, a malefactor, or a transgressor*, on that account, notwithstanding his *private* repentance between God and his own soul, is so natural, easy, and usual a way of speaking, as ought to cause no difficulty at all in the present case."

WHISTON's sermons and essays, p. 11, and 15,  
printed 1709.

Bishop Hoadley: "It appears that he was a person, who, when he had a fair opportunity, did seriously consider the character and pretensions of our Lord; who, upon that consideration, believed in him, and received him as the Messiah; and who took the first opportunity he had to declare and profess this: though he had no hopes of any benefit from hence, unless in a future state;  
and

and was rather discouraged from it, than incited to it, by the tempers and behaviour of all about him. He was called to the knowledge of the gospel; he obeyed that call; and he did whatever was in his power, during the short time God afforded him, to demonstrate the sincerity of his faith. What should hinder, therefore, but that he should be received by our Lord, who came to offer acquittance and justification to all, who should believe him to be the Messiah, and should act agreeably to the faith and practice enjoined by him, during the remainder of their lives, whether long, or short."

TERMS OF ACCEPTANCE, first edit. p. 357.

Dr. Clarke: "There is no instance of any that ever wilfully and designedly, after their knowledge of the truth, delayed their repentance, and yet perfected it and were accepted afterwards. On the contrary, the scripture rather expresses an exceeding great danger, lest *such* should not be accepted at all. The

thief

thief upon the cross indeed was accepted, because it was the *first* opportunity, though in the *last* part of his life, that he had of confessing his faith in Christ. But from hence no argument or apology can be drawn for those, who *wilfully despise* our Lord, and his holy commandments, in the *whole course* of their lives."

Dr. CLARKE's sermons, vol. 9. 12mo. p. 193.

Mr. Brekell of *Liverpool*: This my very learned and worthy friend, whom I lately consulted about this instance, told me, that from the knowledge this person had of Christ's history, and his clear persuasion of the *true* nature of his kingdom, he appeared to have lain in prison a considerable time, where he might be informed of these particulars; and that he might have been in prison, added he, a long time, was very probable, as the *Jews never* publickly executed criminals, but at some of their grand festivals.

Dr.

Dr. Taylor: This great man, and eminent critic in the scriptures, thus expresses his sentiments concerning this extraordinary case, in a *letter* to his learned and excellent friend the Rev. Dr. *Law of Cambridge*. “ The thief on the cross, I make no doubt, was acquainted with Christ, and had heard him often preach. For he could say, ‘This man hath done *ouðev aτoπoν*, nothing amiss, nothing inconsistent with his pretensions as the *Mef-  
siah*. Probably he had been one of his fol-  
lowers, and heard such discourses from him, as *John* vi. declaring what he had to give was *eternal life*, after his resurrection. This did not suit the temporal expectations of many of his followers, who then left him. After he had left Christ, pursuing his car-  
nal scheme, he fell in with robbers, was taken, cast into prison: And then, having done with all earthly hopes, he began to reflect upon and relish what he had heard from Christ: But retaining still a part of his

*Jewiſh*

*Jewish* errors concerning the Messiah's kingdom [as the mother of *Zebedee's* children] he imagined Christ could do nothing till he was in actual possession of his kingdom. *Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom,* and see if any thing can be done in favour of a poor wretch ! Our Lord answers, " You need not suspend your hopes till then ; even *at present*, and in my low circumstances, I have authority to assure you, that you shall have a place with me in *paradise*, not in an *earthly kingdom*, but in paradise; the word by which the *Jews* most familiarly and distinctly expressed the future state of blessedness."

Dr. LAW's Theory of Religion, 4th Edit.  
p. 407, 408.

Reader ! now, I beseech thee, impartially review and examine this instance, and consider, whether any just argument can be deduced from it to prove, that a few broken ejaculations, and a confused penitence of two

or

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or three moments, when we are struggling with the pangs of death, will atone for the vices of a whole mis-spent life. What conformity, what resemblance is there between the circumstances of *this* person, and the circumstances of persons early initiated into the knowledge of the Christian religion, admonished day after day to attend to its important lessons, and warned with the greatest faithfulness to repent and reform their lives, yet obstinately rejecting this repeated advice, drowning the kind and friendly remonstrances of conscience in the excesses of riot and sensuality, fondly pleasing themselves with the thought, that God is all benevolence and mercy, and that surely *one* repentant sigh from a dying sinner cannot be repulsed, cannot but find a gracious admission to the compassionate and indulgent Parent of mankind. What weakness! what fatal delusion! Did God, think you, ever design, that *all* the scripture precepts should be superseded

superseded by *one* single scripture example, and that too of a thief? Whatever it is that makes us easy in the habitual practice of any of the vices condemned in the gospel, is certainly a most wretched cheat and imposition upon ourselves. God Almighty requires from us the practice of universal righteousness. *Without holiness no man hath ever seen, nor shall ever see the face of God.* No man was ever disturbed at the review of a good life, but millions have been wretched, beyond all description, upon a death-bed, and would have given a thousand worlds, could they have commanded them, for a few months, for a few weeks, for a few days respite from death, to prepare for that awful state, whose prospect fills them with consternation and horror unutterable. O Christian! what folly and madness is it, therefore, when the great God hath so faithfully warned thee of the evil of sin, and the danger of continuing in a course of it, hath given thee so many invi-

tations to repentance, hath set before thee so many encouraging motives to virtue and obedience, thus to insult him by promises of future amendment, thus to defer the great work of thine eternal salvation from one week, month, and year to another, to believe any thing, and hope any thing, rather than reform a bad life, to reduce thyself *at last*, by this inexcusable conduct, to a condition that no man in his senses would be in for ten thousand worlds, to trust to an ineffectual repentance full of nothing but infinite confusion, terror, and distraction of mind, to incur wilfully the most dreadful and destructive shipwreck that it is possible for a rational creature to suffer, and to cling to a deceitful plank, that never brought an immortal soul to shore.

A N  
A D D R E S S  
T O  
Y O U N G P E R S O N S.

THE foregoing reflections were composed solely with a view to serve your best interests. I can assure you I had no other intention, by all that I have written concerning the folly of delaying amendment, and the unacceptableness of a death-bed repentance, but to excite you to early piety and virtue. *This* is infinitely reasonable. God is our creator, governor, and benefactor.

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We are his rational and intelligent creatures, and under infinite obligations to his paternal goodness. As soon as reason dawns, and we are made acquainted with our indigence and dependence, we should determine to make the will of so great and good a Being the law of all our actions. As soon as we arrive at any maturity of understanding and reflection, we should form the most deliberate resolutions to choose the path of virtue, and to suffer none of the temptations of this life to shake and subvert our resolutions. Having, therefore, represented to you the danger, infamy, and wretchedness of a course of vice, and faithfully exhibited before you the dreadful situation of a dying sinner, I implore your serious and candid consideration, while I shew you the amiableness and excellency of a religious life, and the various and exalted blessings you will assuredly reap by devoting the bloom and vigour of life to the service of God. I beg you would interpret the warmth of this ad-

dress in the most favourable sense, as the sincere dictates of a pathetic and benevolent mind, that is painfully conscious that your present and future happiness or misery depend on that course of life you now choose.

§. I. By the early practice of virtue you will escape a great deal of sin and sorrow. I need hardly observe that vice is the source of misery, and that a course of it occasions above half the evils, diseases, and sufferings that infest and shorten human life. The practice of it is, in no one instance, man's felicity and good, even in this world. Were there no future state, vice could never be proved to be the road that conducted men to happiness. A few transient, brutal gratifications, I allow you, it may afford; but they are sure to be followed by satiety and remorse. It addresses itself only to the inferior and ignoble part of our nature, the animal passions and propensities; these it sooths and flatters; but at the same time it obscures the eye of

reason, involves the understanding in darkness, perverts the judgment with prejudice, and drowns reflection and conscience in riot and sensuality; the only powers of human nature, that can by proper culture yield us true and permanent happiness. The pursuit of forbidden pleasure is sure to fill the body with the seeds of many acute and direful distempers, which ruin the health, break the constitution, and bring on untimely death. These are the *sure* consequences of a vicious course. For though the native strength of a constitution may, perhaps, for a considerable number of years, baffle and surmount every wicked method to impair it, and defeat every senseless attempt to destroy it; yet the evening of life will come, in which all the penal effects of vice, which have not yet been felt, will suddenly attack the sinner with redoubled fury, and make a dreadful compensation for their long delay, by the severity of the punishment they will inflict

inflict upon him \*. To choose vice, therefore, as our chief good, is to choose pain, misery, and death, in their worst forms. For sin and sorrow are inseparable. Misery flows from it as necessarily, as the effect flows from any *natural* cause whatsoever. Now these dreadful miseries of our nature early religion prevents, for it fortifies us against and enables us to repel temptations, and, consequently, precludes those horrid and complicated evils, that are occasioned by a compliance. Are you desirous, then, to lead a life of the truest comfort and the most solid and sublime happiness; are [you desirous to secure as much real pleasure and self-enjoyment, as possible; are you desirous to possess health and ease, tranquillity and cheerfulness; are you desirous to be esteemed and loved by the wise and good; are you desirous to escape those cruel pains and diseases, entailed upon men by debauchery, drunkenness, and intemperance,

\* Lento gradu ad vindictam sui divina procedit *ira*: tarditatem vero supplicii gravitate compensat.

VALER. MAXIMUS, Lib. i. Cap. 2.  
which

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which destroy the health and happiness of so many thousands ; then religion, religion is the only happy choice you can make, for religion is the parent of all these blessings.

§. 2. Early piety and virtue will yield you the truest comfort and peace of mind in all the various changes and events that may befall you in this world. This is the great excellency and advantage of a religious life. Innumerable adverse accidents may deprive us of our domestic happiness, our estates, fortunes, and the necessaries of life ; innumerable diseases may deprive us of our health and usefulness ; but no external events, or calamities whatever, can rob us of the inward satisfactions of a good conscience. The comforts and consolations of religion attend us in every varying scene. These divine joys are not affected by all the vicissitudes to which human life is subject. They continue the same in every situation and condition of life, clearing, comforting, fortifying the soul.

Big oted

Bigoted rage, persecuting fury, ingenious torture, gloomy dungeons, and galling setters, may afflict the body of a good Christian, but they cannot solicit those divine joys that flow from his religion. The *good man*, whatever his distresses and sufferings may be, *is satisfied from himself*. Neither his religious principles, nor the comforts they administer, change with every changing scene ; the spring of his consolation is indefectible and constant, and blesses him with calm and refreshing streams in every stage of life's journey.

The consolations, which religion supplies, will clear and fortify the soul under every sinister occurrence and calamity. In *adversity*, the strength and power of piety and trust in God, will dissipate all gloomy fear and melancholy dejection, and dispose the soul to pleasing acts of cheerful obedience and composed resignation. In *sickness*, it will invigorate and support the soul with its divine comforts, possess it with a calm indifference to this life, and

raise

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raise it to the full and transporting prospects of that world it has long been aspiring after. In *poverty*, religion will prevent all impious complaints, all uneasy, repining, querulous murmurs against the dispensations of Providence, will direct us to view our indigent circumstances in the most favourable light, as being the wise appointment of Heaven, and to support them with patient and submissive resignation to the good will of God. In *disasters and losses*, religion will moderate our grief, by teaching us not to regard the possessions of this perishing world as our chief felicity and supreme good, but to place our affections upon more solid and durable riches. In the *abuse of the world, the perfidy of friends, and the loss of affectionate relatives*, religion administers the most powerful remedies, enables us to meet them with composure and firmness, engages us to renew our trust and affiance in our Almighty Father and Friend, and

to

to consider them as the salutary corrections of his paternal hand.

If we turn our reflections to the bright side of Heaven's dispensations, religion will appear to shed as kind an influence over them. For this will greatly refine and exalt the happiness of prosperity, by teaching us not to abuse it to lust, luxury, and licentiousness, but to restrain our appetites and passions within the bounds of moderation and temperance. It will invigorate *health* and cheerfulness by supplying the best foundation for serenity and joy, and by dissipating that dejection and gloom which are so unfriendly to our natures. So that in every station, condition, and circumstance of life, in prosperity and adversity, in health, afflictions, losses, calamities, and poverty, in all these infinitely chequered scenes of life, religion supplies a pure, constant, heart-ennobling felicity.

Is it not then, I appeal to you, your highest wisdom and interest to determine to embrace religion

religion and virtue, the great sources of all this happiness ! Will a course of profligacy, riot, intemperance, lust, and dissipation, supply such inward joys as these in an hour of adversity and pain ? Will the review of unlawful pleasure, made when disease and infirmity invade us, afford the mind such serene tranquillity and divine consolations as these ? So far from it, that it will fill you with wretchedness and horror unutterable.

§. 3. By early piety and virtue you will lay the only solid foundation for true happiness in old age. Assure yourselves, that there never was, nor can be, an happy old age, that has not been preceded by a virtuous life. Human life is transient and visionary ; youth, manhood, old age follow each other in close succession. Soon that season will arrive when the powers of our natures will be impaired, when frailty and infirmities will seize us, when the darkness of a long, long night will be collecting round us, and when

when we shall have nothing left but our reflections. Our strength will be exhausted, the eye obscured with dimness, every native grace deformed with wrinkles, the body bowing with decrepitude, and unable to support itself, the faculties of the mind debilitated and broken, and every thing will desert us, but religion. O religion ! how sacred is thy power ! how clearing is thy influence ! Nothing but the soothing consolations thou impartest can soften the last sad frail decline of this vain life, that passeth as a shadow ! Nothing but the heavenly prospects thou openest to our minds can re-animate our scattered spirits, and brighten our nature's last extremity !

How solicitous, therefore, should we be, as ever we are desirous to enjoy a calm and cheerful old age, to accumulate a fund of happiness for it, by entering betimes upon a religious life. Let us, who are in the prime and vigour of our days, be diligent in cultivating

vating virtuous dispositions, and deeply implanting in our minds the principles of religion, the enlivening support of which every hour will want, but most the *last*. Live and behave, in early life, in such a manner, as that you may in old age be able to take a review of life with transporting satisfaction. For be persuaded, that amidst the many evils that oppress declining nature, amidst the gloomy and unfriendly clouds that gather round the evening of life, nothing can infuse one comfortable beam, but the silent testimony of a good conscience. Religion is the only support of old age. Religion is the only enjoyment we have here below, that is subject to no decay, and liable to no diminution. Its consolations continue the same in every successive period of our natures. It smiles with a benign aspect upon every stage of life, but throws the softest and most refreshing light over our *last*. While, therefore, others are piling up the wealth and riches of this

vain world, and reserving them for old age, thinking then to extract happiness from them to sooth and clear its infirmities ; let us, who are raised by the gospel to the hopes of a blessed immortality, act with superior wisdom in our generation, and collect such a treasure of knowledge and virtue, as no accidents can lessen, no afflictions diminish, nor old age exhaust, but which will prove an unabating stream of the purest pleasures and divinest joys. Let us be cautious we do nothing in youth, that may disturb and wound us in our future reflections. When we are strongly inclined to perpetrate any thing criminal, let us check ourselves with the timely thought.— “ How shall I be able to look “ back upon this in future life : When lying “ on a death-bed, I come to reconsider the “ past scenes of my life, will not *this*, recur- “ ring to my remembrance, pain my mind, “ and distress my conscience ? How, there- “ fore, shall I do this great wickedness, and “ sin

“ *sin against God*, and thereby fill my mind,  
“ *hereafter*, with cutting remorse and trou-  
“ *blesome reflections* ! ”

§. 4. Religion will support you in your last moments. I have shewed you, *above*, the horror and wretchedness that attends a death-bed repentance. I have represented and described to you the dreadful state of that unhappy creature, whom some fatal distemper has just awakened to a sense of his undone condition, and who utters piercing cries to God for pardon, while struggling in the agonies of death. If you would not experience this dreadful condition, then you must not act as he did. You must determine to make the wise choice in time, and not delay the great work of salvation, as he did. You see in what wretchedness a course of vice plunges its votaries, how it deprives them of all comfort at a time when most they need it; and whatever *present* pleasures or advantages it may bring them, you see it is ruin and misery

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in the *end*. You have many instances (perhaps your attendance on the sick and dying has furnished you with several) that the principles of vice will not enable a man to bear up against the fears and terrors of death.—They cannot think of death.—They shudder and shrink back at the painful thought of it.—But why fear that, which is the great law of our nature?—Because they have every thing to fear from it.—*Hence* these terrors. But, blessed be God! tho' the wicked have *justly* every thing to dread from death, the pious and good christian has every thing to hope from it. Conscious virtue disarms death of its sting, and meets it with serene composure and undaunted fortitude. In the midst of death the good man can triumph, and, with auspicious joy, cry out in the apostle's language, *O death! where is thy sting! O grave! where is thy victory!* He, who has secured the favour of God by early obedience, is not appalled at the *darkness of*

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*the valley of the shadow of death*, assuredly knowing that God will conduct him through it to endless glory and blessedness. Nay, his religion disperses its gloom, infuses a friendly and chearing ray of light into it, and makes him enter it with songs of conquest and triumph. Need he have any formidable impressions of death, who has devoted his youth and riper years to God? death will introduce him to his God and redeemer, and to the seats of immortal joy and happiness, that they have prepared for him. The stroke may be painful: the dissolution of our earthly tabernacle may be violent: but it cannot last long—the conflict will soon be over—and a crown of glory then awaits our virtue. But how severe soever the pains of dying are, the hopes of religion greatly alleviate and mitigate them. An awakened sinner feels *twice* the racking torture and acute anguish that a good christian feels. For the painful convictions and horrors of his mind far sur-

pas

pass his dying agonies. Oftentimes death to good men is a soft and almost imperceptible translation to glory. The only way, then, to render life comfortable, and death easy, is to cultivate an early piety. The blessed effects of such a conduct will not desert us in death, but will, in that extremity, animate our minds, exhilarate our spirits, fill us with transporting hopes, and enable us to make our exit from the stage of life with decency and applause.

§. 5. Those who consecrate the early part of life to God, and continue steadfast in the uniform practice of religion, may expect a far more transcendently illustrious crown, than those who engaged in religion towards the close of life. This is founded on the principles of unerring rectitude and justice. If God will distribute rewards in exact proportion to the merit of actions and services, certainly he will be entitled to the most distinguished honours, who loved him the *soonest*,

and served him the *longest*. Such an one will be recompensed with a *far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory*. He, whom not the follies and levity of youth, the arrogance and ambition of manhood, or the avarice and obstinacy of old age, have drawn aside from the paths of duty, shall be advanced to the highest eminence of dignity and happiness, and their steady and victorious virtue shall be proclaimed before angels and men in the loudest acclamations of honour and applause.

Youth, therefore, should be excited to devote themselves to God, not only that they may attain future felicity, but that they may attain eminent and distinguished degrees of it. For if, as the word of God assures us, there will be differences in glory, as great and striking differences, as between the faint rays of a twinkling star, and the strong effulgence of the glorious lamp of day, then assuredly the spirits of those, who have made uninterrupted improvements in religion and virtue, from the

dawn

dawn of reason to extreme old age, shall shine in the full splendor of glory and blessedness for ever and ever. O what raised and sublime happiness then do they forfeit, who squander away the prime of life in the most abandoned and shameful pursuits, and offer only the refuse of life to God's service ! heaven has rewards for early and persevering virtue, worthy to excite all our vigour and activity, and to kindle in our souls a generous fervor and ambition. Who would not, therefore, who is possessed with any affecting sense of his best interests, exert all his endeavours, deny himself every beloved gratification, burst the bonds of every sinful connection, and spring forwards with invincible ardour *towards the mark, for the prize of his high calling in God our Saviour.* The crown that is before us will amply reward all our contention ; and the sooner we present ourselves as candidates for it, the more shall we be loved and rewarded by the great and impartial dispenser of it. Let

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us then throw off our inactivity and sloth, let us not form vain pretences and frivolous resolutions of future amendment, let us not hesitate one moment which is the eligible course, but immediately and deliberately resolve to embrace religion and virtue. To begin the practice of religion in youth, is beginning where God and nature designed we should begin. Youth is the only season for making improvement in any branch of knowledge and science. And is religion the only science that has no charms for youth, that is difficult and unpleasing, and that will not compensate all our pains to learn its important lessons? this divine knowledge, if *early* acquired, will, like every other branch of knowledge acquired in youth, sink the *deepest* and last the *longest*, and imbue the mind with such excellent principles, that it will ever retain a most grateful odour of them. Resolve then to begin a religious life: He that has once begun a virtuous course, says the moral

poet,

poet\*, has half finished. Whatever difficulties it may cost you, whatever beloved vice it may constrain you to abandon, whatever friendships it may oblige you to dissolve, deliberate not what you are to do, and how you are to act, but, at once, break the enchantment, and vindicate yourself into virtuous freedom and liberty. Do but once determine to forsake your vices and practice virtue, and you will soon convert the practice of it into a most pleasing and delightful habit, that will bless you with infinitely more pure and elegant happiness, than any you experienced in your beloved vices. **CHOOSE THE BEST KIND OF LIFE** (says *Pythagoras*) **AND CUSTOM WILL SOON RENDER IT AGREEABLE.**

\* *Dimidium facti, qui coepit, habet supere aude:*  
Incipe — HORAT. EPIST. lib. Ep. ii. 40.

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